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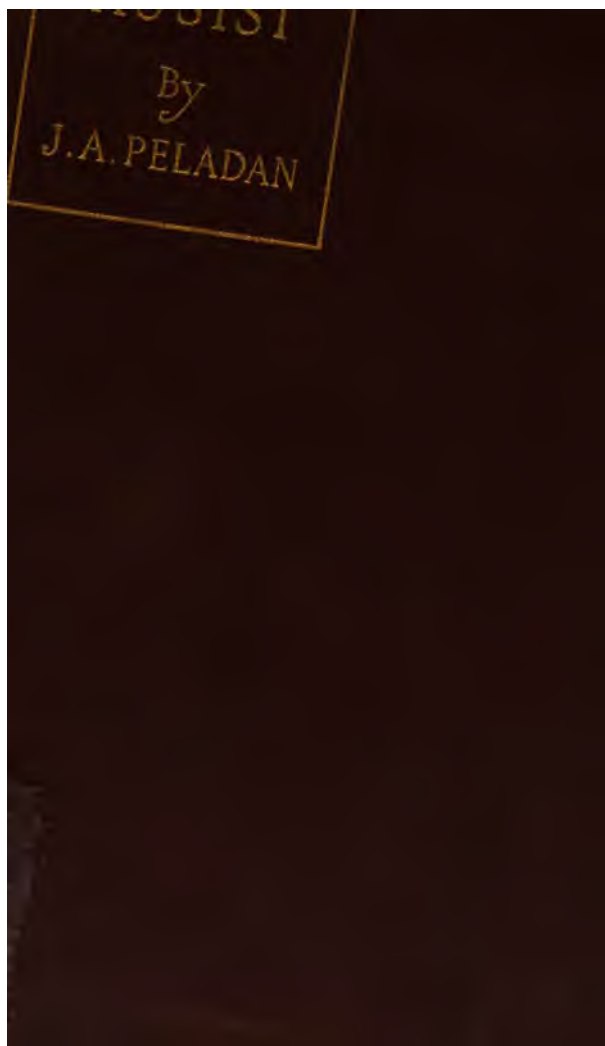
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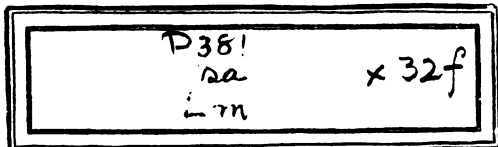
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ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

**ST. FRANCIS
OF ASSISI
A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS
BY J. A. PELADAN**

**TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED BY
HAROLD JOHN MASSINGHAM**

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CHARACTERS

FRANCIS BERNADONE

BERNARD	}	<i>Brethren</i>
EGIDIUS		
PETER		
SYLVESTER		
LEO		
ANGELO		
ELIAS		
JUNIPER		

LADY CLARE

CECILIA	}	<i>Sisters</i>
EMILIA		
GIOVANNA		
MONICA		

GIOVANNI DELLA RENNA

VALENTINE

RUFUS

GENTILE OF CAMPILIO

BERNADONE, *Francis' Father*

COUNT FAVORINO, *Clare's Father*

BISHOP GUIDO

COUNT UGOLINO, *Cardinal-bishop*

COUNT OF GUBBIO

GOVERNOR

BISHOP

DOCTOR

DOMINICAN

CITIZEN

MAN OF ASSISI

MAN OF PERUGIA

BEGGAR-GIRL

BEGGAR

*Lords, Muses, Children, Retainers, Musicians, Pages,
Acolytes, Crowd and Urchins, &c.*

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ACT I

THE TROUBADOUR

(The terrace of the castle of Sasso and Rosso on the skirts of Assisi. Mount Subario in the background; the street on the left, down the stage; a bower in the middle.)

(BERNARD, in the guise of Mercury, is engaged in hanging golden apples on a tree; CECILIA, GIOVANNA, and MONICA disguised as Euphrosyne, Aglaia and Thalia; CLARE as Spring; EMILIA as Flora is being pursued by EGIDIUS as a Zephyr.)

EMILIA. *[Out of breath.]* Let me go.

EGIDIUS. *[Catching her.]* Zephyr am I, sweet Flora, god of the wind-breath!

EMILIA. *[Shielding herself.]* Too close you breathe upon me!

CLARE. *[Interposing.]* A truce to these rogueries!

BERNARD. I have hung the apples of gold on every branch. There is but one remaining, O Graces! Who will be Atalanta?

CLARE. Tarry no more for Francis. . . . There is our allegory to rehearse. . . . I am the Lady Spring.

BERNARD. You are enchanting!

EGIDIUS. Meet for adoration!

CLARE. [*To both.*] Why cozen me thus? One service and one only will I admit. You know it well.

EGIDIUS. O fortunate Francis!

BERNARD. Through me Assisi tenders you the prize, the guerdon of Venus.

CLARE. Bestow it upon the Graces! Back, ladies, to your Flora! [*Dance of the Graces.*] Frantic that you are! Caper not like the Bassarids.

BERNARD. Come to our play! I am my brother Apollo. The Muses circle round me.

CLARE. Let us apprehend our argument: *The Marriage of the Muses.*

GIOVANNA. And of the Graces!

CECILIA. A knight, I would have my knight!

MONICA. And I, shall I be unaccompanied?

EGIDIUS. Why came not Francis, to be master of our pageantry?

BERNARD. His father the cloth-merchant, it would seem, has held him to the counter.

GIOVANNA. [*To Bernard.*] But the Graces! Is there no division of parts between them?

BERNARD. They are one, in unity: the mind, the soul and the body.

CECILIA. Let us cast lots!

GIOVANNA. I am the Mind!

CECILIA. And I the Soul!

MONICA. Give me the Body! it has its fealty.

CLARE. Who shall be the first to speak?

BERNARD. On the threshold of this bower, will I hail the suitors.

CLARE. Then let the Muses make choice of their spouses.

BERNARD. Love is blind and all eyes shall be bound. The astrologer will open his arms to Terpsichore; the judge to Erato; the juggler to Polymnia. . . . 'Twill be the drollest spectacle and as much logic as life!

[Enter the NINE MUSES. They rush frantically in.]

CLARE. See! They come, the blessed virgins, the nine Sisters of Parnassus. . . .

EUTERPE. My flute?

CLIO. My scroll?

MELPOMENE. My dagger?

ERATO. And my lyre?

URANIA. My orb?

CALLIOPE. My tablets?

THALIA. My mask?

TERPSICHOE. My timbrels?

POLYMNIA. And I, I too have nought?

BERNARD. But the infinite? Sweet ladies, I have brought you everything in a casket with my wand of Mercury and Francis' cap and bells.

CLARE. Up then! Fetch the casket.

BERNARD. *[To EGIDIUS.]* Egidius, come with me.

[Exit BERNARD and EGIDIUS.]

CLARE. Hearken, my chucks. Transform yourselves into the likeness of little figures in a fresco. Clio, in thy gravity, let thy gaze encompass the

vanished past ! Let thine, O noble Urania, cleave to the vault of heaven ! Do thou, Melpomene, clasp thy hand in wrath upon thy dagger !

[*Enter BERNARD and EGIDIUS carrying in the Casket.*]

BERNARD. Regard, O daughters of Apollo, the baubles of your symbolism.

EGIDIUS. To the monk his cowl and to the Muse her emblem !

BERNARD. Calliope, receive your tablets.

EGIDIUS. Thalia, don your mask.

BERNARD. Terpsichore, your timbrels.

EGIDIUS. This scroll is yours once more, O worshipful Clio.

BERNARD. And the lyre returns to Erato.

EGIDIUS. The orb for Urania !

MELPOMENE. My dagger ?

BERNARD. Here, with the flute for Euterpe.

POLYMNIA. Is there nought for me to hold ?

EGIDIUS. Naught save the cap and bells of Francis.

CLARE. His sceptre ! It is mine, his lady's to take.

BERNARD. The music-players are at hand.

[*Enter MUSICIANS.*]

CLARE. [*To the musicians.*] Range yourself afar a little, behind the bower. Melody, wafted, like a breeze, from unseen instruments, is the more bewitching. Play you in gentle strains and chiefest, to accompany our singing.

[*The musicians begin to play behind the bower.*]

ERATO. In what form shall we cluster ?

URANIA. I, as the symbol of Heaven, take precedence.

POLYMNIA. Thought, I would have you know, captained astronomy.

OLIO. But history, I say, outpaces you all.

TERPSICHORE. But I, nathless, being the most nimble of foot, will gain the day, for all your striving.

CALLIOPE. Forget not, my sisters, that I am own daughter to Homer.

THALIA. You and your precedences! Fine food for merriment you are!

BERNARD. Let us group in two choruses: the foolish and the wise!

ERATO. And the foolish?

EGIDIUS. Will be thyself, Euterpe, Terpsichore, and Thalia!

EUTERPE. The others, priestesses of Dullness. . . .

CLARE. Peace! you droning bees, while I adjust the scene. The Graces to the centre, with their limbs entwined, as it is figured in the ancient marble at Siena. Sit thou here, Calliope, and unfold thy tablets: Urania, lean thy orb upon thy knee; here, let History stand, hard by Epic Poetry, and Tragic, Inspiration hold thyself close to Thought Austere. And thou, attune thy reed to the song of thy sisters. Let Comedy be yoked to Dancing. Right marvellously done! 'Twould win the plaudits of a painter. List! do you hear the merry din? Sweet maidens, it is the coming of your lovers. My flowers, my flowers, where are my flowers?

[Exit CLARE.]

[*Enter VALENTINE of Narni as a knight;
GIOVANNI DELLA RENNA as a juggler;
ANGELO as an astrologer; RUFUS, PETER,
&c. Costumes of Gazzoli: they come
in from the street at the back of the stage.*

BERNARD. Wherefore come you, lordly strangers?
Who pointed you the road to the enchanted garden,
where our Lady Spring is Queen?

VALENTINE. Love spake to us, our puissant lord:
"How pass you the hasting hours, brave hearts? I
come to discover you a venture, deserving your
endeavour. The Muses, far-famed virgins, till now
unyielding to my bondage, to-day forsake Parnassus'
banks, by my cunning enkindled with the flame
of my spirit. To bend their ears to mortal vows, I
have conjured them. Away, blessed knights of my
triumph." Thus the voice of the god and we are
come to entreat love's compassion of the Immortals.

[*Enter CLARE.*

CLARE. [*Her arms full of flowers.*] Welcome, in
the name of Love! A radiant purpose lures you
hither and nought earthly, nought unchaste is your
desire, O lovers of beauty, O lovers of virtue! The
dragon ever watches by the treasure and Peril
ever rears its head in the path of happiness. He,
the foolhardy, who shall lift his impudent gaze upon
the daughters of Apollo, unbidden of her, straightway
is smitten with blindness; therefore shall your eyes
be bound. She, who with her sweet hand shall
restore your sight, will be gracious to your vows.
Mercury, to your task!

[BERNARD *blindfolds the newcomers and*
EGIDIUS *leads each one opposite a Muse*
or a Grace, whilst CLARE delivers the
following verses. A symphony is played.

CLARE. The wise man hath said: Love hath the countenance of a pleasant heart and the one without the other stumbleth in the way. How shall the soul spurn argument? For Nature, the when she lifteth herself to live, determineth Love for Sovereign and delivereth her heart unto the keeping thereof. Even so, the soul resteth and is stilled.

The wise woman standeth at the gates and her comeliness hath moved the young men; so that flames shoot from their eyes and love stirreth and clappeth the wings of desire. Likewise, the hearts of the women are awakened, what time a valiant one cometh forth on the threshold.

[*All are on their knees in front of a Muse.*
Each one simultaneously takes off the
bandage. The symphony continues.

[*Enter FRANCIS, in magnificent and fantastic dress.*

FRANCIS. A masque of delight! What loveliness and fragrance is joy, to the beholder of it! This bower, a-shimmer with love and youth, is it not a vision of Paradise? Innocence is twin-sister to happiness. Their mouths are gladdened with laughter, their eyes are a sheen of pleasure. Verily they are joyful, these lovers. My soul burgeons with the happiness I look upon and with the gladness of others I am uplifted.

CLARE. [*Going up to him.*] Francis!

FRANCIS. O lady, O Muse, O lover and divinity, I greet you with flame in my heart.

CLARE. Your shining robes already in tatters?

FRANCIS. The seams were tricked from collar to hem with golden braid and with ducats of gold.

CLARE. They are stolen from you.

FRANCIS. Nay.

CLARE. [*Aside.*] He has given them away. [*Aloud.*] You, the master of the pageantry, why have you loitered and abandoned me solitary among these lovers. Is this a true knight's courtesy?

FRANCIS. [*In an ecstasy.*] The knight-errant rides forth with lance aloft to make straight the wrong and maintain the right. The guardian angels walk by his side. A star gleams upon his helmet.

CLARE. Your sceptre, Francis!

FRANCIS. [*As before.*] Beloved motley! Smiling head and tinkling bell and heart beating for the love of it. Tears are idle and the passion of love is fugitive. Folly, be thou my mistress!

CLARE. Tell me, what look you upon?

FRANCIS. What can I else but upon you, when you are nigh, the flower of beauty, gentleness and excellence!

CLARE. Come, lead me to the dance. They frisk without us.

FRANCIS. Had I hardihood to vent my caprice. . .

CLARE. Would you have songs?

FRANCIS. Ay, gladly, were it in your renown.

OLAIRE. [*To all.*] Hold, dear friends, break off your measure, our king will sing to us.

[*They range themselves about him.*]

FRANCIS. Imperishable ladies, hardly may I come unto you.

Clean are my tablets, Clio, unworthy thine own,
Thou, Calliope, thou rhymest none but heroes.
Lo, the wonder of thy firmament affrights me, O
worshipful Urania.

Thou would'st smile, Polymnia, upon my homely thought,

My heart blenches and is turbulent within me
Quickened by the sombre notes of Melpomene
And you, jocund sisters, spurn my unworthiness.
I am the bird of the woods, carolling his lay
From branch to branch, all carolling his lady's
name,

Imperishable ladies, hardly may I come unto you.

CLARE. The true Muse was ever Queen. This prelude delights me.

[*Enter, on the road at the back, a BEGGAR WOMAN, who stops to look on.*]

FRANCIS. My Muse is outcast and reviled, albeit,
holy virgins, dedicate unto your service.

How runneth the record of history? It is the monument unto fevered ambition, neither are the heroes cherished of the bard, but frantic and evil-hearted.

O tragic Muse, thou art red with blood, and tears gush from thine eyes, and ye, blithe-hearted sisters,

light are your lovers, younglings and of no account.

Ye laugh, ye sing, ye dance ; the while the three fates,
sickness, eld, and death, spin their web everlasting.
Rejoice, while ye may and seal your eyes unto suffering,
that lieth in wait, unceasing, upon the way.
For they that are happy are children and without heed.
Folly is my Muse. She setteth her head high among
her sisters, transcendent lady, virgin without peer.
The name of my Muse, that is outcast and reviled.

CLARE. Strange invocation !

BERNARD. [*In a whisper.*] Pack this beggar-woman off. If Francis beholds her, there will be a vexing interlude.

EGIDIUS. [*To the BEGGAR.*] Away with thee !

FRANCIS. [*Who has observed him.*] Stay, my child. The spectacle of the wretched poisons my delights. In their presence I am shameful and dare no more be glad. Their days that are without bread and their lives that are without hope unseal the lids of my remorse, as it had been I that had stolen the lot in their destiny. Look upon this maiden, ragged and with naked feet, [*To CLARE*] clothed like you, how pretty a thing ! Entreat her gently and gallantry would rejoice her as you. Why then a beggar ? My soul is affrighted at the wherefore of injustice. Whence comes she, Sorrow, Muse overcast, Muse without death, from the heavens or from the pits of hell ?

CLARE.] Well, let her have alms and go. Here, woman !

FRANCIS. [*Stopping her.*] What! as a dog has its bone. She too has a soul!

BERNARD. Francis, you mar our festival. . . .

FRANCIS. I would see a beam of joy lighten those sunken eyes, watching the fortunate of this life, ay and wonder, with more reverence than envy!

BERNARD. I wager that he will bring her in to join the dance.

EGIDIUS. Away with thee, thou gipsy.

FRANCIS. Poor swallow, an instant touching with thy wings the threshold of this mossy bower, I tell thee, stay!

BEGGAR. Lord, I dare not.

FRANCIS. They that spurn thee are not evil. They are but rich; nor wot they of the mystic chain linking sadness to delight. Thy face is swarthy, but how white thy soul! These, here, their fingers are rosy and their hearts are sullied. They laugh and sing, but thou weapest and thy streaming tears are thy adornment.

PETER. [*To FRANCIS.*] She can compass nothing of thy fantastic pity.

BEGGAR. But well I see that this lord has the goodness of the angels.

CLARE. [*To FRANCIS.*] Come, what is your burden?

FRANCIS. This . . . that you, our Lady of Beauty, give your hand to our Lady of Poverty.

PETER. Would you have us suffer her to the dance!

FRANCIS. As it is with you, so with her. Be the greeting friendless or kindly, her heart is wrung or gladdened. She is agog for the frolics of her age.

B

Let us fill her with merriment for a span, that she may forget the chilling night, stretched at the tree's foot, the long tread of the morning. The lark has perched upon the garden-wall, cherish it awhile, before it spread its wings anew.

CLARE. Whimsical that you are! For the poor there is alms. Shall we bid them to the merry-making?

BEGGAR. Lord, let me depart. I am not welcome.

FRANCIS. Not so. I will bend them to my persuasion. I plead the supreme sanction, which is the privilege of this sceptre. I am your prince and you shall hear me. If it be your will to dethrone me after, so be it. I am your elect, not, I warrant, for my skill in hoarding ducats. To be lavish and more lavish is my single desert. To give is my satisfaction and I have grudged nothing to any man, neither to stranger nor to my friends. Joy, poesy and beauty are my exultation, but the terror of grief overwhelms me. Awhile I sang, as it liked me, till the glance of this child reached my heart. To her this bower is the abode of enchantment. You are comely, you are young, you are sumptuously vested, and your lips are smiling. Would you hunt her away with heavier feet and drooping head towards no certain refuge, saying in her sorrow: "It was a fine thing to be with the rich. I looked upon their festive sports and I forgot my misery; but my sorrow marred their merriment and they hunted me away." Ah, sweet comrades, not even for your good pleasure, will I have it, that on the day of judgment, a poor man shall

arise and cry against me : " Hard of heart was Francis to me that was weak ; and niggard in the midst of his plenty ; evil, for all his Christian blood." Thaw your hearts, O you who are so smooth in speech of love. . . Love is compassion ! Love is tenderness of heart ! Thus like bread to the body, it is the gift of a little joy to the soul. What are your claims to happiness ? The indulgence of gentle birth was granted you. Everything has been yours and without your deserving. O radiant maidens, welcome this beggar-girl, as she were your sister. Give place to poverty within your festive ring, that heaven therein may have its portion.

CLARE. Friends, let his words have their sway. Much have they troubled me.

EMILIA. Verily, my heart is touched !

CECILIA. I have surely wept !

MONICA. Francis has a poet's heart !

BERNARD. Obey him this night and on the morrow Francis will bring a leper or a madman, the blind or the palsied. Our sports will become the refuge of the lame, the halt and the epileptic. Nay more, let us found a lazar-house.

FRANCIS. Hitherto have I served your caprice, deaf to the voice of authority ringing this day in my heart.

CLARE. What says that voice ?

FRANCIS. That Pity is the authentic Muse ; that those that suffer must be comforted ; that the flowers which the tempest has bowed must be uplifted ; that the limpid waters of the runnels shall not be muddied ;

that friendship to all animals and brotherliness to all creatures is the law.

BERNARD. [*In a whisper.*] Does that voice not admonish thee how thou troublest the Lady Clare?

EGIDIUS. [*In a whisper.*] The beggar-girl is young, ay and comely. Dost thou forget it?

FRANCIS. [*Abashed.*] It is so!

BERNARD. Thou offendest thy friends, thou afflictest her, who holds thee dear . . .

FRANCIS. I sought to gladden the face of grief and another, most dear to me, is shadowed. Clare. . . .

CLARE. Wherein have I rebuked you?

FRANCIS. Oh, can it be that I have grieved you?

CLARE. I beg you let the girl go!

[*The BEGGAR weeps.*]

FRANCIS. It is Poverty which weeps. I, who would have soothed this child, have but added to her sorrow.

BERNARD. Hearken then to the voice, the voice that thou must obey. Make thy choice between the frown of Clare and thy beggar-girl.

FRANCIS. [*Distracted.*] Love summons me, rosy spirit of delight, but grief, the magnet, allures me, whether I would or no.

BERNARD. Thy faltering offends the Lady Clare.

FRANCIS. Sweet comrades, I entreat you, bid the girl welcome to the dance!

BERNARD. Thy subjects, king of the follies, yield thee dominion no more!

EGIDIUS. We will have thee abdicate, like a king in truth.

FRANCIS. Rudely is a gulf hollowed between us. Ay; I am thrust out of your path. Dear friends, I have loved you well.

PETER. Come, quit him!

CLARE. Francis?

FRANCIS. You, you alone are piteous among them, O blossom, O jewel of Assisi. Lovely and gracious, sweet of soul, forgive me that I offend you. Why I have acted thus, I will make clear, when I myself shall know it. Go then, with them. As in a vision; I bow to a decree.

[Exeunt All, except FRANCIS and BEGGAR.]

BEGGAR. My gentle lord.

FRANCIS. Say not so. Thou wert but the instrument of my fancy. I sought and failed to cheer thee for awhile.

BEGGAR. Lord, you are kind.

FRANCIS. How signifies the act of kindness? My betrothed is cast down and my friends are weary, that in thee I might hail a symbol of holiness! Want, child, is the mark of sovereignty and they who spurn it are without light. Child, take thy road again. I should but say unto thee things of too dark a purport and of no avail. Gladly would I give thee money for thy journey, but I have nothing.

BEGGAR. *[Pointing to the bauble.]* Thou hast this.

FRANCIS. The bauble? Verily this plaything of mine has a seemly destiny, to grace the hand of poverty. Take also my cloak. 'Tis streaked with many colours. With these thou canst play the mountebank and make sport with the children in the

villages. When the door is rudely shut against thee, as is the lot of hapless wayfarers, remember, for thy comfort, how thou didst meet one evening Francis Bernadone, that he used thee courteously and greeted thee, Poverty, as true lady.

[Exit the BEGGAR.]

FRANCIS. Alas, what ails me this day? All of a wonder am I and regardless of the world in what I do. Clare took leave of me and sorrow looked from her eyes. She had no compass of my deed, so passing strange, causeless and astonishing myself. Whence comes it, this voice that the ear recks not of, but tolling through my heart, like echo through a valley, triumphant? The old passes away and the new begins. Awhile, I trifled and I loved myself; it is dead and new intents are born with me, bountiful but remote and dim! *[Laughter in the wings.]* I hear their merriment with unconcern. What moves across my conscience? Pshaw, who would give heed to such an issue? I would but have welcomed to the dance a beggar-girl, and my friends have said me nay. Pity, thy name is penalty! The sorrowing faces of the poor gaze from the threshold of the banquet, amid the roses of the bower and turn my cup to bitterness. And Clare! I have wrung her heart. O God, the meaning of it?

[He sits down dejectedly.]

[Enter CLARE.]

FRANCIS. *[Going towards her.]* How gracious is your coming to me that am guilty. Can it be that

you forgive my wayward oddity? O miracle, I have dared offend you!

CLARE. The gipsy, where is she? Sooth, by your quick frenzy, I did think that you would wed her.

FRANCIS. Her spell, it was her penury alone!

CLARE. Francis and Poverty! Such marriage were a symbol!

FRANCIS. You mock me. It is but just.

CLARE. Grant it, the gipsy liked you well?

FRANCIS. Nay, she was but an allegory, a riddle, an idea. . . .

CLARE. And the idea?

FRANCIS. Compassion does no hurt to love! Its bounteous substance in us, we are quick to light on sorrow.

CLARE. And thus you shield yourself!

FRANCIS. Will you confound me? How shall I declare what barely I surmise?

CLARE. At least make trial, it is my due!

FRANCIS. You will judge me mad. It may be that I am!

CLARE. In sooth, but now you were, though I am merciful.

FRANCIS. When Jesus appeared among men, did He come robed in a pope's tiara or the purple of an emperor? Nay, He walked with naked feet, with but a single coat, and neither house, nor fields, nor flocks were His. The bread of charity was his sustenance alone. The precious metals that sleep in the bosom of the earth were His to gather and His to strew at every step. What multitudes would have

run to be his retinue! But He would not. He was resigned to human circumstance; as we are, so was H. But his hand fingered no coin, for gold is not measured as men value it, and the poor alone have the likeness of Jesus.

CLARE. The gold of Jesus was a gold of the spirit, glorified, immeasurable, from the mint of eternity and scattered for ever. It is Love.

FRANCIS. Love is the core of the riddle, but how is Love the revealer . . . ?

CLARE. It is enough that two beings bound the one to the other in a burst of flame.

FRANCIS. O Clare, my beloved, without peer; your eyes are starred with spotless beams and your lips of rose are aflame. As the star sheds its light, the motion of your hands, hands without mar, spills blessings and felicity. Heaven has stamped the fullness of its peace upon your brow. Your countenance mirrors the universe, transmuting it to joy and calm and immortality.

CLARE. Poet mine, the incense of your words enwraps me and I am giddy with them. Love . . .

FRANCIS. Love radiates all about us. The toilsome day, the day of struggle wanes and man has left his labour and the bird has told its song. The cradling night stretches its soft scarf of velvet over the westering sun. The clouds are lingering in their gait and quiet is upon the leaves; the winds are stilled and the runnels cease their broil. All things are gathered to night's cloister, in thought and adoration.

CLARE. [*Rapt.*] The air is filled and filled again with minstrelsy. Mine ears do catch it.

FRANCIS. Heaven dowers the earth with the sainted kiss of even. O inexpressive hour, sweet with harmony; in thee all lives are melted in their source. Of old, John lay upon the shoulders of the Master and now Creation slumbers in the arms of the Creator.

CLARE. My soul claps its wings to thy voice's melody. See, the first star, how it leaps down to the last streak of day. Thus, I turn towards thee, drunk with thy spell. But the skies let not fall and the earth casts not up this hour's beatitude; it jets from our yoked hearts; the evening's witchery is the mirror of our love. [*The angelus rings.*

FRANCIS. Sweet sounds chime in my ear.

CLARE. It is the angelus.

FRANCIS. The angelus?

CLARE. The Angel of the Lord announced to Mary. . . .

FRANCIS. [*Passionately.*] The birth of Love.

[*Embrace. The angelus rings till the fall of the curtain.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II

THE KNIGHT

(In the background cypresses and pines stand out against the sky. On the right, the Chapel of St. Damian; by the crumbling wall, above a stone altar, can be seen a Byzantine crucifix, consecrated to St. Mary; a missal is upon the altar.)

[BERNARD, EGIDIUS and PETER.

BERNARD. Behold the ruined Chapel of St. Damian, where the cloth-merchant's son will buckle on the golden spur of knighthood.

EGIDIUS. Wherefore has he preferred this ancient hermitage?

PETER. Who can unravel the crotchets of Francis?

EGIDIUS. The people will flock to see him consecrate.

PETER. Our bishop Guido is to lay his hands upon the new-fledged Paladin. *[He goes into the chapel.]*

EGIDIUS. This ceremony will give high pleasure to Bernadone. It has cost him many a ducat, but vanity has muzzled avarice. A knight's sire! It has fetched his purse-strings open. Our good friend is sumptuously furnished.

BERNARD. *[Coming out of the chapel.]* This ruin is

naked to all the winds and nothing I can see, but a tall Christ, an ancient painting and a mouldering missal.

PETER. What strange imaginings has Francis!

BERNARD. He is fitly named. The faults and virtues of fair France are vested in him. Dreamer and madcap, a man of whims and bounties, heroic and the son of folly. What he says would ever make men gape. We laugh and he weeps; he laughs upon our gravity. Is he poet, is he monk or is he dissolute? For in him three men are mingled and haply to be a saint, haply a madman is his destiny.

EGIDIUS. Poet, not hero, is his mark. Conceive him cleaving the foemen! Use horse or dog with roughness and his spirit stirs. Let a chance beggar cross his steps and he is moved to pity. In winter, the very skylarks are his care.

PETER. Surely he is valiant. My eyes have watched his disregard of peril, but nothing will mend his sensibility.

EGIDIUS. For well two moons he has played the noisy braggart, and is overmuch equipped with finery. Let him now draw back and there will be a pretty din in Assisi, and a fine wrath from the father for the ducats he has spent.

BERNARD. 'Twas but the other day he told me, with his candid air: "I shall make the noblest prince."

EGIDIUS. Should Robert of Brienne have no better a captain, the Germans are like to be lords of Apulia for many a day yet, despite the Pope's admonishments.

BERNARD. Francis has his head stuffed with adventure and renown. He has conned the French lays, Roland, Arthur, the Round Table, Perceval. . . .

PETER. A trusty warrior, Gentile of Campilio, is to be his sponsor.

BERNARD. Think you he will quit Assisi in quest of phantoms, he who is beloved of our Lady Clare . . the rose of beauty and virtue ?

PETER. The Lady Clare is countess born, nor will her haughty sire, the lord Favorino of Sciffi, suffer a match with lowliness.

BERNARD. Nay, he would yield before his daughter's tears, gilded by Bernadone's many shining ducats.

[Enter FRANCIS, fully armed, GENTILE of Campilio and Train.

FRANCIS. [*To the three above.*] Dear friends, boon fellows of my junketings and soon to be sponsors of my conversion. Gentile of Campilio, a knight of fair report, my mentor, is no stranger to you. Ah, who can boast that he can cast the horoscope of fate aright! The merchant's son, your jester prince, haply will come to be a king indeed. The liberal fire of conquest glows within me ; the lustre of my fortune summons me and the wide world shall ring with my name. My gentle comrades of our merriment and dalliance, the lute of the troubadour is laid aside. Do you likewise. Have done with noise and matters of no profit.

BERNARD. Whence comes it, this new mission, thus unexpectedly ?

FRANCIS. We are fain to pierce the mystery that

is life, some by pleasure and others by endeavour, but the first are astray. Awhile I dallied to my full, but now I gird myself, to serve and to deliver. The deed, the deed exalts me. Tenth Muse is she, so lifted high from her nine sisters, so towering that she has no name. Seven sacraments are there, but thou, O knighthood, art the eighth!

BERNARD. His brain is ever quick with fancies; profane and sacred blossom afresh with secret flowers of his imagination. Lo, we have a new Muse and a Sacrament unknown before.

GENTILE. Let him battle but as he talks and the city will reap much glory.

FRANCIS. Wherefore this melancholy that weighs upon the world? It travails under the sway of the mighty, under the hand of Cain. The knight, angel of earth, harbinger of justice, is consecrate to weakness. He is the warrior of the oppressed, the fulfilment of the divine word. He smites and the arm of the Most High is made manifest, for Roland's lance is a holier thing than Turpin's crosier. Ah, let me feel the hallowed spurs, steel of Heaven, clasp my heels; let the clean blade gleam in my right hand, the two-edged blade, blade of justice, deliverer of the poor from the tyranny of the rich, salvation of the innocent from the snares of the froward; then shall I deem myself regenerate, then shall I be deserving of your love.

GENTILE. Warfare is the call of a ruthless heart. Bernadone, lean not overmuch upon pity! The warrior is the wild beast; he rends and is rejoiced.

Feel but the dreadful rapture of battle; let thine eyes be but tranced with the sight of blood; be but possessed of the frenzy of the rout, of the trampling and the slaughter; gaze but upon thy foe in his throes in the dust, his head crunched beneath thy foot, and then, then shalt thou know thy mission.

FRANCIS. Oh, savagery!

GENTILE. Stand in fancy before thy foeman. The world fades from thee and one of you is doomed. Thou art blind to all save two eyes shooting their fiery swords upon thee; deaf to all save the hissing breath of his hate. It scorches thy face and rage gets hold upon thee. Thy sword is lifted and whirled about thee; thou smitest It shivers the helmet; it pierces the skull, and the head, like a ripe fruit, is split in twain, cloven to the nose, ay, and to the teeth, and the brain gushes out in its fragments . .

FRANCIS. Oh, horrible imaginings! The knight, who fells his foe, spares when he is prostrate.

GENTILE. Thou thinkest upon the joust; the combat of courtliness.

FRANCIS. Wounds and death I will defy, and ever bear myself in knightly wise.

GENTILE. When the thrusts crack thy armour and thy blood clots in the joints of iron, thou wilt be savage enough, I warrant thee, like us all.

FRANCIS. The encounter of knights is else than that of wolves!

GENTILE. Thy faith is in the troubadours, false charlatans, whose poesy doth cheat the hearer, to beguile him. The knight is kindred to the wolf, save

only in the cause. The beast is thrall to hunger and the doughty knight is servant to renown. Be the stakes what they may, for shame or glory, but man is turned to wolf in combat. Dub him heroic wolf, wolf consecrate or wolf of heaven, yet wolf he is and savage, ravenous. Elsewise, men fight not ever.

FRANCIS. Hold thy peace! Wilt thou sully my vows with thy foul conceits? Art thou not sensible that life is a holy thing, that to deal out death is a challenge to God Himself?

GENTILE. Be you my arbiters! This Francis apprehends warfare as he would a tourney. War is the poem of spilled blood; its green palm-branch burgeons on the charnel heap. The strain of victory swells amid the death-rattles and the lamentations and mounts with the pestilent reek of the carnage.

FRANCIS. God will have none of it.

GENTILE. Seek out the oracle of history and the epic. What were their deeds, those renowned, those mighty, those glorious emperors, captains and valiant knights, the theme of men's praise and the argument of many a lay? They slew without pity, without truce. Alexander, Cæsar and great Charlemagne, what were they? Destroyers with vultures for their retinue. Their every eve was purpled with burnings, turning the verdurous fields to desolation and mowing 'neath harvests of dead men God's blessed grain, with mighty sweeps of the sword. Verily, warriors are wolves and wolves only. . . .

FRANCIS. The Kingdom of the Lamb. . . .

GENTILE. How is Jesus revealed to humanity? By

His blood. Redemption is the price of pain and to be made manifest the Everlasting sacrificed His Son. By blood and through blood is the accomplishment of earthly things. Behold, the universe is red and streaming, for Christ's blood oozes from the promptings of triumph and to slay the trespassers is our sacred task.

FRANCIS. Nay, to vanquish them, to turn them to repentance. Death shows himself and the inflexible purpose of a chastened life is exalted.

GENTILE. Thou pratest, Bernadone, like a priest and not a knight.

FRANCIS. [*Starting a little aside.*] See, how swiftly the firmament lowers upon us, and the shining path, the path of the Holy Graal, is unveiled, forbidding, bloody, a dreadful thing. There streamed before my eyes a banner studded with stars; so blithe I was. St. George stretched me his hand and a wolf comes in his stead. O fealty, justice and courtesy, three muses of knighthood, enchanters of my soul, what shape have you taken upon you?

Roland and Godfrey, were you but wolves? The voice that brought me hither is silent and only peradventure in solitary contemplation will my ears catch it again.

PETER. [*To GENTILE.*] Good man-at-arms, you are no cunning orator. Your speech affrights his zealotry, before it is scarce born.

GENTILE. How shall he bear the shock of blows who trembles at a word?

PETER. Nay, but Francis is not yet upon his way.

C

GENTILE. Pish !

BERNARD. [*To FRANCIS.*] Whither goest thou ?

FRANCIS. Let silence be my counsellor !

[*FRANCIS enters the Chapel.*

[*Enter CLARE, followed by CECILIA, EMILIA and MONICA. PAGES carry in the helmet and the sword on cushions and another PAGE bears the lance.*

BERNARD. [*Going up to CLARE.*] Ever fond to him who ill rewards you ! To venture the hazard of battle he forsakes you and you come to grace his passing !

CLARE. Rebuke him not, I tell you. He is crested with my favours !

BERNARD. Beloved of you, and yet he goes ! What dowers the madcap fellow with such magic in your eyes ?

CLARE. Sirrah ! Step warily !

BERNARD. Verily, your love deserves not to be his !

CLARE. Howbeit he is lord of it, and if he spurn it my heart is shut to all men and opens never.

BERNARD. In all Assisi there is no man who would not haste to serve thee and abandon all.

CLARE. Therein their sacrifice would be of no avail.

BERNARD. You have forgiven his passage with the beggar-girl ?

CLARE. Francis did not err.

BERNARD. Ah, that smacks of witchcraft.

CLARE. Comrades bring to trial and reproach their fellows ; but lovers harmonize and interpenetrate. To think as he thinks has become my portion, let him wound me as he may. [BERNARD moves away.

FRANCIS. [*Who has had his eyes fixed on the crucifix.*] How mild is the glance of those eyes upon me, no mirror of the Passion's awfulness, but brotherly, compassionate, shedding their pity for our daily need. He who set His mighty sign before us, the heroic One, Who took unto Him Poverty and Death afterwards for wife, æthereal nuptials, He looks upon us inexpressively. He has shed no blood, but gushed from His own veins. He forbids to slay, ay, and the most evil. The Lamb of God will have no captaincy of wolves. My hands are virgin yet, and undefiled with blood.

GENTILE. [*Uneasy.*] His orison is everlasting.

PETER. You have quickened his every queasiness.

GENTILE. Surely he will master it.

FRANCIS. [*Rapt.*] True chivalry is not of iron. But how shall I lay bare the better path, and who will show it me?

GENTILE. [*Going towards Francis.*] He lifts his voice in prayer. What says he?

CLARE. [*Stopping him.*] Revere the mysteries of his soul.

GENTILE. I am unquiet for my pupil, Lady Clare.

FRANCIS. [*Joining his hands.*] Thou, Source of all being; God in man and God in brotherhood. From this cross of shame Thou governest the world, and by Thy death Thou hast created it anew. Evil has bowed the knee, not by the sword, but by Thy example. Thou hast but shown life's best maturity and Thou hast conquered. Hasten the unrest in which my spirit strays. O Jesus, what is my task? A word,

a token? I hail Thee for my sovereign. Do Thou, Who seest into all hearts, search mine. [*A silence, followed by a sharp exclamation.*] Who calls on me? Who spoke my name? Lord, is it Thou? Nay, so great a wonder cannot come to pass, and I am mazed. [*Another silence.*] This time I can no longer doubt; my name has spurted from Thy lips. [*Throwing himself on his knees.*] Lord, Lord, I am here. Thy knight doth mind Thee, King of Heaven; direct me with Thy word. What wilt Thou that I do? Thee it was I sought through all my follies, and thought to find Thee in my feats of valour. . . . Teach me Thy will and reveal me the way of Thy favour. I am Thy servant, Thy soldier, and Thy slave. [*Silence, broken by heavy sighs of astonishment.*] O wonder of my salvation. Thou deemest me worthy of a quest. Thou biddest me "mend this chapel"; it is Thy will that I should prop Thy tottering Church for "love of Thee." Gracious and Almighty, it shall be according to Thy pleasure. Up, couch Thy lance against the age and look you how a Christian knight shall match the proudest Paladin. My faith I pledge Thee, King of Heaven. I, thy knight in fealty, will bend the world to acknowledge Thy dominion.

[*He stands up, and appears on the threshold.*]

CLARE. [*Perceiving FRANCIS on the threshold.*] A splendour radiates from his countenance. Behold him!

CECILIA. He has a prophet's mien!

MONICA. His eyes gleam with an unearthly lustre!

FRANCIS. O chivalry, phantasy of glory, and thou, O gallantry, phantasy of love, farewell!

CLARE. What says he? Have mine ears heard aright?

FRANCIS. Lady, my vows are taken; I entreat you hearken to them.

CLARE. Francis, your mien, your words disorder me, and fear possesses me. . . .

FRANCIS. Without that voice unspeakable, thrice holy, within my uplifted soul, I could not endure the sweetness of your own.

CLARE. What voice mean you?

FRANCIS. The voice which said unto Simon Peter: "Come, follow Me."

CLARE. You pronounce these ruthless words with fondest stress.

FRANCIS. Your eyes preserve their sovereign appeal, but others, that I may not withstand, have looked upon me.

CLARE. What eyes mean you?

FRANCIS. The eyes that dared not look on Judas at the Last Supper.

CLARE. Ill-fated one! He is persuaded that Jesus has appeared and spoken to him.

FRANCIS. It is true.

CLARE. Can it be that the Saviour has come down from Heaven and robbed me of your soul?

FRANCIS. Though He has gathered all my heart, yet are you no exile from it.

CLARE. If you are His, my betrothed is lost to me.

FRANCIS. My soul still cherishes your own; its passionate sister.

CLARE. Forbear! Your talk abuses reason and singleness of heart. Will you become a priest?

FRANCIS. Nay, I will keep my knighthood. Sackcloth, the colours of my King, I will carry as my gage, and I will do His works: humility and poverty.

CLARE. [*In despair.*] Thus my foreboding is fulfilled and he espouses poverty.

FRANCIS. The marriage celebrated of old in Galilee. . . .

CLARE. And the love that was dedicate to you?

FRANCIS. No love it is, but love's phantom.

CLAIRE. A phantom! The effulgent flood that washed our hearts. . . .

FRANCIS. Such love is torch-light in the darkness of the night; another glisters as peerless as the sun. Hardly can I fathom it; but soon I will discover it to you.

CLARE. Art thou mad, or false of heart?

FRANCIS. Love signals me and I must bow to its decree. You are the consummate bloom of every beauty, but Heaven lures me to its wondrous bounties.

CLARE. My love and his renown, he has forsaken them!

FRANCIS. My aspiration flies to glory everlasting, and I am learned in immortal things.

CLARE. His spirit's wings speed proudly upward; while I, I linger here, mingled with the throng. Nor is his resolve ruffled by aught of regret.

FRANCIS. Forgive the evil that I do you. I will atone for it.

GENTILE. [*To FRANCIS.*] Come, what has thy meditation revealed to thee?

FRANCIS. One more cunning in words will declare it to thee.

BERNARD. Thou hast been right chary hitherto of aid to tell thy mind.

FRANCIS. The King Himself will be His herald's interpreter.

EGIDIUS. Thy spirit is inscrutable, nor can I divine it.

FRANCIS. [*To BERNARD.*] Go, fetch the dusty Gospel from the altar.

[*BERNARD nods his head and obeys.*]

EGIDIUS. We shall be partners in some odd caprice. The Lady Clare can scarcely stay her tears.

GENTILE. It misgives me now as to what portends his mission.

BERNARD. Take thy book.

FRANCIS. Open at a venture and read therein.

BERNARD. [*Reading.*] "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow Me."

FRANCIS. By his choice, the Christian knight is first a beggar. [*To BERNARD.*] Consult the book a second time.

BERNARD. "Take nothing for thy journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money."

FRANCIS. The Christian knight leans upon his God alone. The last time, Bernard, read where thou wilt.

BERNARD. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and follow me."

FRANCIS. Such are the decrees of Christian chivalry. Indigence, security in God and self-despising. Bear testimony all to this my triple vow.

CLARE. Oh, heaven!

BERNARD. I said aright he would not go.

EGIDIUS. And wilt thou store the virtues behind thy father's counter?

GENTILE. Renunciation of thy knighthood thus; the pity of it!

FRANCIS. For me, the cross is meeter weapon than the sword, and I will bear my burden sans fear and sans reproach. My horse finds favour with you, Gentile?

GENTILE. It is a peerless charger.

FRANCIS. Take it. It is thine. Wouldst thou my lance, my buckler and my sword?

GENTILE. Thou art pleased to jest? Thy father comes this way.

FRANCIS. Which father mean you?

BERNARD. Verily, his wits have left him!

FRANCIS. Say not so! My wisdom comes to birth. Each man is fathered twice, . . . His earthly father who begat him, and to whom all reverence; his heavenly Father Who created him, to Whom all adoration.

PETER. Be wary of thy father here below.

FRANCIS. Here I declare the first-fruits of my valour, and in this place I challenge all the world, world's logic and world's wisdom.

BERNARD. Francis, what is thy claim?

FRANCIS. To fulfil my Father's works!

PETER. Hey, but thy father is a merchant.

FRANCIS. Eternity he bartereth to his sore affliction.

PETER. Take heed of Bernadone's wrath!

FRANCIS. My heed is only of Christ's festival!

[Enter BERNADONE.]

BERNADONE. Where art thou, new-fledged knight?
Dear son, it gladdens me to see thee furnished thus.
Nay, not Robert of Brienne himself has such an
equipage.

FRANCIS. I fear thou wilt be sore provoked, my
father.

BERNADONE. I will be indulgent to thy pranks, upon
this day of grave ceremony. Who calls the merchant
Bernadone niggard, who orders his array thus
sumptuously?

FRANCIS. Surely, my father, thy testiness will
scourge me!

BERNADONE. Is it more of thy besotted charity?
Thy ducats ooze away like very mites.

FRANCIS. My father, I entreat thy pardon.

BERNADONE. Ay, I pardon all, for chivalry's fair
name.

FRANCIS. My father, I forsake the sword, the lance.

BERNADONE. What say'st thou.

FRANCIS. I was deluded. No buckling of the spur,
but other is my mission.

BERNADONE. How?

FRANCIS. Hear me then, father. My new intent is
contrary to thine.

BERNADONE. I did make shift of full many of thy crotchets. . . .

FRANCIS. Hereafter, I am done with them.

BERNADONE. Declare thyself. What is thy mind?

FRANCIS. My purpose is to don the hermit's cloth.

BERNADONE. Ho! thou rascal! Restore me first my ducats and my fair repute. This stroke of thine has fleeced me of my wealth and stripped me for the gibes of all. Already the tauntings of the city din my ear. A truce to this craziness, I tell thee. The Bishop is upon his way, and 'fore God, he'll come upon no bootless quest. His blessing is as costly as a suit of armour. Francis, enough of this thy plaguy folly.

FRANCIS. Father, as I have spoken, so shall it be.

BERNADONE. Sirrah! Beware!

FRANCIS. Your displeasure is but just and I acknowledge it.

BERNADONE. Give ear, good Francis. My speech is mild. Impose not this presumption on me. Ponder awhile. Thy youth has been full prosperous by my means. Thou hast been welcomed by thy lavishness within the circle of the nobles. To give was thy delight, and by my assent. Wilt thou, this day, put my good name in jeopardy?

FRANCIS. My own I stake likewise, for I have sworn to be God's servant.

BERNADONE. Wilt thou beard me? Handle thy lance, else I will wield it as a cudgel and thou wilt be witness of the merriest drubbing.

FRANCIS. You are incredulous, but natheless I speak troth. Jesus vouchsafed to speak unto me.

BERNADONE. Thou fool, thou overweening, doltish thing! Thy words do spell derision. Jesus spake to thee, presumptuous boy!

Look upon this saintly mouther, this miracle-worker, a popinjay, a wanton ever dangling the guitar. For ever mumming and bedding with the dawn. God speaks to him, and he is never at the church. . . .

FRANCIS. I am unworthy of His graciousness, but our gentle Saviour has oft been pleased to winnow forth the frailest and the lowliest, that his loving-kindness might shine the brighter.

BERNADONE. So God has spoken to thee? Well, sir, what said He to thee?

FRANCIS. He charged me restore His tottering church.

BERNADONE. What church?

FRANCIS. This ancient chapel!

BERNADONE. So be it! Let all men testify my matchless excellence; myself will bear the burden and execute the heavenly decree. I will pay the masons; but thou, fulfil thy vow!

FRANCIS. If the Emperor commanded you: "Do this," would you summon menials for the task? Yourself would do his will, for honour's sake. Jesus requires that I rebuild the church with the labour of my hands, and no silver will I take but in charity. . . .

BERNADONE. The hermit is converted to the beggar. Oh! last extremity of folly. Is thy sick brain yet

pregnant with new contrivances, to my confusion? Wilt thou shame me thus?

FRANCIS. I bend my head unto my heavenly Father!

BERNADONE. Thou caitiff, dost thou renounce me? Knowest thou not what heaven enjoins upon children . . . to be reverent and dutiful?

FRANCIS. Thy words are true; but Christ has spoken.

BERNADONE. Speak He thus and He is contrary to His very precepts.

FRANCIS. I am full sensible of your choler.

BERNADONE. And thou shalt have full evidence of it, except thou dost comply.

FRANCIS. Liefer would I die!

BERNADONE. A cudgel! Fetch me a cudgel!

[He seizes FRANCIS by the neck.]

[Enter GUIDO, in a cope, followed by
ACOLYTES.

GUIDO. Peace be with you! Sir Bernadone, wherefore this anger?

BERNADONE. Sire! My son apes frenzy, to distract me. The froward has it that his heavenly Father forbids his enterprise to the crusade, and he will forswear his knighthood to become a beggar.

GUIDO. I am come to sanctify his arms. If he turn his purpose, I will depart.

BERNADONE. Will you not admonish this, my unworthy son? Will no censure issue from your lips? He whelms me with disgrace and makes me food for mockery. He has renounced me and

bruted it abroad. Deem you him not meet for censure?

GUIDO. Sir, these brawls are family matters. If it please you chastise Francis, arraign him before the Councils.

FRANCIS. Let me make the church my vocation and I am exempt from their jurisdiction.

GUIDO. It is true. If then, my son, thou proclaim thyself consecrate to Holy Church, I, in thy name, will uphold the freedom of the priest.

FRANCIS. I am Christ's servant, I declare it.

BERNADONE. Unnatural child! Son of perdition! I disinherit thee.

FRANCIS. My father; unflinching I forswear. . . .

BERNADONE. Words, words! Make good thine apostolate. Forswear in writing with due ceremony.

FRANCIS. It is well.

BERNADONE. Take my ink-horn and the vellum, for the Bishop to attest his signature. Hand me thy renunciation. And know this, that a hermit has no need of patrimony.

FRANCIS. My father, herein I may obey you, and I am prompt to do your pleasure.

[He enters the chapel.]

BERNADONE. Thou whoreson, thou wretch, thou treacherous knave!

GUIDO. Hold, sir, you are too short with him and stretch your words past moderation.

CLARE. Francis is witless, but you, sir, are over-harsh.

BERNADONE. Hey! Do you shield him? It be-

comes you, Lady Clare, alike with me to hold him in abhorrence.

CLARE. Myself, I love your son ; you love him not.

BERNADONE. He renounces me before you all.

FRANCIS. [*Writes on the altar.*] Lord, I am ransomed from all earthly sanction, and to Thee alone am wholly dedicate. To love, to family and the world I say farewell for Thy loving kindness only.

BERNADONE. [*Raging.*] Not only is he madman, but a very thief. This speciousness of his has filched me of my wealth. Think you I would have lavished all this brave array upon him, had I divined his perfidy ? He has plundered me, and is a pilferer.

FRANCIS. [*Overhearing.*] Ah, he shall be restored his possessions, all that has been mine.

[*He passes behind the altar and takes off his clothes.*]

BERNADONE. Thou beggarly rascal ! thou cheat ! thou accursèd dog ! Wilt thou bring down buffooneries on my grey hairs ?

CLARE. Sir, your words are shameless and unfatherly.

FRANCIS. [*Rushing from the chapel, bearing his garments in a bundle and the vellum.*] Harken all and hold my words in memory. Peter Bernadone, hereto I named you father ; henceforth I am God's squire. Therefore I lay down the portion of my heritage and yield him all, my raiment also. Nought have I now pertaining to him. Thus and thus only I shall speak hereafter : " Our Father which art in Heaven." [*He casts his burden at his father's feet.*]

GUIDO. [*Drawing him under the covering of his cope.*] Francis, assuage thine exaltation and come, shelter beneath my cope.

BERNADONE. Look upon him, look upon him, the demoniac!

A BEGGAR. [*Emerging from the crowd.*] Full many a time has Francis fed me with the bread of charity, and I do gladly tender him my ancient mantle.

CLARE. [*To BERNARD.*] A hard commentary upon you is this beggar's deed.

BERNADONE. He gets no more of me, does he say? He is deceived. The crumbs of my affection I surrender to him. My curse upon his head!

FRANCIS. [*Who has put on the cloak.*] A father's curse, ruthless as it be, affrights me. Thou, who hast bestowed thy mantle on me, take thou a father's office.

BERNADONE. Wheresoever I shall find thee, Francis, there I will vent my curses on thee.

FRANCIS. [*To the BEGGAR.*] If thou seest Bernadone curse me and I shall say to thee "my father," cross thyself and bless me in his stead.

BERNADONE. [*To an urchin.*] If thou wilt, this ducat shall be thine. Run through the streets of Assisi and herd the urchins to you. Tell them a madman shelters at St. Damian. Flock hither in a press to stone him and torment him. Him who was my son, I deliver to their hootings.

[*Exit BERNADONE bearing the garments of FRANCIS and the vellum.*]

GUIDO. Francis, what wilt thou do?

FRANCIS. Accomplish my vow !

GUIDO. The ways of God are dark, nor can I determine judgment. Whether a seer elect of God, or whether antic, the future shall discover.

[Exit with his train.]

BERNARD. What is friendship's office ?

PETER. We cannot countenance his folly.

EGIDIUS. Come, quit him !

GENTILE. When all forsake him, meditation will advise him best !

[Exeunt all ; CLARE and her friends after all the rest. FRANCIS stands apart as if in prayer.]

FRANCIS. *[Alone.]* Each several link is shattered, yea even the link of love, the link of blood, and by my hands. I stand unfettered, freest of mankind. This mantle, lent me by a beggar, is my only goods. Inheritances, law-suits, traffics, O sorry cares, remote from my imaginings. Unpent, like birds they soar above me, sporting in the lustrous firmament of deathless dreams. This day, what signifies the covenant of men ? The devil I defy ! my neighbour I defy ! Stones and calumny I run the gauntlet of alone ! He who shall come to slander me is my friend, for he will 'put my patience to the proof. Henceforward nought shall chance, that serves not for my uplifting. Behold, I am distant, out of time, out-topping man and fronting God. O poverty, I greet thee with an heart aflame, my puissant mistress, our Lady of deliverance.

[Enter a troop of URCHINS who climb the

*small hillock. They come forward with
silent grimaces and surround FRANCIS.*

CHILDREN. The madman, the madman. Out, out
upon thee. Hey, the madman. Ho, ho.

FRANCIS. A corse entices flies and I am dead to all
my fellow-men.

CHILDREN. The madman of St. Damian
Looks in the church to find,
Guess! Something less than nothing,
His mind.

Ho, ho, out upon thee.

FRANCIS. Behold these innocents, already evil-doers
for the sake of gain.

CHILDREN. The madman, hey, the madman.
Ho, ho, out upon thee!

FRANCIS. There runs a tale of how the flies assailed
a lion, so that he perished. Methinks I shall be quit
of them for less, a little plaster and some hallooing.

CHILDREN. [*More aggressive.*]
The madman of St. Damian
Looks in the church to find,
Guess! His mind.

[*Enter CLARE.*

CLARE. [*To the Leader.*] A ducat has been given
thee and here are more. Now, get thee gone, thee
and thy rascally playfellows.

URCHIN. Ho, come, all of you to my feast. Quit
the madman, quit him! See! These ducats all for us!

CHILDREN. Hey, hey, huzza for the madman, shout
for the madman! [*Exit CHILDREN.*

FRANCIS. O sainted woman, come you back to him,

D

the son accursed of his father, him, forsaken of his friends, the beggarman, the witless one? All have fled my presence, but the Lady Clare is with me. O face, new come from Paradise, O Madonna's heart newborn, my benisons upon you.

CLARE. Francis, why played you me false? A stouter faith from you was my desert. Deny the world and it is well, but why denied you me likewise?

FRANCIS. Verily, I am guilty in your sight. At a breath it came to pass, an it were a vision. I besought an healing inspiration in my sore distress and Jesus tarried not to answer me. Come, O my beloved lady, come and haply the wondrous crucifix will speak to you.

CLARE. Nay, I fear this baneful ground, wherein my dream of youthfulness, my dream of sweet felicity, has taken wing.

FRANCIS. My own likewise. And, oh, what pleasantness!

CLARE. Your love is vanished from me. Oh, tell me wherefore is it gone?

FRANCIS. I have loved you never as I love you at this hour, when I am wretched, solitary, dishonoured.

CLARE. Natheless, you spurn me away!

FRANCIS. It is the voice which leads to God. Already you go after it, for you are come and speedily to comfort me.

CLARE. But at the last, you leave me sorrowful, to follow a voice all excellent in your eyes and heedless of my wounded heart.

FRANCIS. I will call upon God; I will call so earnestly that he will restore me my betrothed.

CLARE. Of your own will you hunt her away.

FRANCIS. I am the servant to a God of excellence, of justice and of great kindness . . . And I shall not lose you. That I know full well.

CLARE. O words void of understanding! You lose me; I declare it unto you. Farewell. *[Exit.]*

FRANCIS. God's own. Yea, you are his and you are mine. The grace of Heaven sits upon you. Oh, slender as a flower, praised be the Lord who fashioned her in comeliness like this. To my task! I have loitered overmuch. Let me rebuild the chapel.

[He begins to carry stones.]

[FRANCIS working. Up stage, CLARE and her friends, BERNARD and PETER.]

BERNARD. According as he spoke he has done!

PETER. He is mad!

BERNARD. Come, leave the witless fellow to his lot.

CLARE. Nay, this is no madman! It is an angel. His heart is of exceeding greatness, of exceeding beauty and exceeding innocence; nor could any woman fill it. Heaven was jealous of my pride! God has snatched him from me!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

THE MISSION OF CLARE—MARCH 19, 1212

(The interior of Our Lady of the Angels—almost a barn.)

[FRANCIS; *around him are his first disciples,*
BERNARD, EGIDIUS, PETER, SYLVESTER,
LEO; *among the audience, CLARE,*
CECILIA, EMILIA and MONICA.

FRANCIS. [*Preaching.*] My masters, my brothers, and my children! your quest is happiness, and I have found it. Fie, you will say. How shall this sluggard, this antic, who set Assisi by the ears, this rude fellow, how shall he presume to teach us, who is less than we? But He Who fashioned the world out of chaos, He likewise fashioned brother Francis out of less. The great King, of Whom I am the herald, spake to me: "Francis, My Church tottereth to its fall," and I did gird myself to build again the chapel. Nor had I compassed that our souls are verily the churches; that Christ doth plant His will within our bosoms, rather than upon His altars. Within the garden, untended and forlorn, rank weeds do choke the flowers. Likewise do passions choke the virtues. Ambition licks us up, and envy is our taskmaster; in

pride of heart we are born; therefore we are in bondage. Man's plaudits steel us to endeavour unrelaxing. From the toils of the world, from the toils of gold I am come to deliver you. Behold me, in my lowliness, a man set free! If one of you should rise and say unto me: "Francis, thy words are like to the braying of an ass," his judgment fits my very estimate. Vanity I have cast away, the burden of folly. Do you likewise. By love our soul has its being. Spurn covetousness and vain-glory, and God is in the room of vanity. Love is harbinger of peace and happiness. One only has cherished us woeful men, He Who like the pelican sacrificed Himself. Therefore love you Jesus. He is mild of heart and of your labour, howso scant it be, He takes glad reckoning. For in love nought is lightly weighed or of little count. Love, and love always, Let your heart be as a furnace, wherein others may be heated. Fire is without stain and without corruption, and nothing base can quench its fieriness. Love and love always; Love is Christ. Grant Him your heart and I will stake you His. He is at once your Father and your Brother, your Friend and your Belovèd. Come to Him, and peace and liberty shall be your portion. Love ever.

[FRANCIS kneels and prays. His HEARERS glide away, CLARE, CECILIA, EMILIA and MONICA only remaining.]

CECILIA. O noble spirit!

EMILIA. A burning star!

MONICA. And dove-like!

CLARE. Sweet friends, divine my sore dismay. Mine ear hearkens to this heavenly voice, the voice that dropped its words of love to me; mine eyes regard this countenance so delicate and smiling; those glistening eyes of jet and ruddy lips; that goodly shape and nimble gait; that surpassing likeness of a courtly knight, and I am racked with bitterness and grey melancholy. There is nought that he laments, but he dwells in peacefulness and bliss, forgetful even that he loved a lady ere he loved his God, forgetful of her tears. Life and faith; I do abhor them!

EMILIA. Be comforted in this: thou hast no rival.

CECILIA. Forgetting thee, he has forgot the name of love.

MONICA. Forsaking thee, his heart must fain forsake the earth!

CLARE. God suffices unto Himself and of Himself He draws his sustenance. How needed He the love of Francis? Lo, while yet a virgin, I am widowed, and, despite my twenty years, a mourner.

MONICA. Reflect on those who will be comforted; the myriad souls delivered by thy lover.

CLARE. Alas! my affliction is my only care, and losing him I lost my soul.

EMILIA. A thousand others are nourished on thy welfare.

MONICA. What he would have given thee he scatters broadcast among all.

CECILIA. That self-same heart, that fain had

dowered thee with bliss, opens Heaven's gate to multitudes.

CLARE. Ah, that touches all my ruth. He is everyman's possession. He gives himself, he squanders himself to all men. He summons this man or draws nigh to him; he gives that man his blessing and hearkens to him. The poor man he will kiss, the leper he will touch. I only, once his lady, I am shut from his communion.

EMILIA. Hast thou seen him, since his vow at St. Damian?

CLARE. Nay, and I have not wished! My pride did hinder me. . . .

CECILIA. Thy pride? Didst thou not hear his words: "Come, cast away vanity, the burden of folly"? He but said it a short while since.

CLARE. Let him preach, and I am deaf unto his words. I hear his voice alone, beloved voice, and I remember what he did confess to me, how he did tell me that he loved me and how beautiful I was, with voice of swelling melody and in the fashion of a madrigal.

EMILIA. Verily, thou art jealous of the boons that he bestows?

CLARE. It is true. The while he was a hermit, roving where he list, in contemplation before God, I could yet endure my sorrow. But whereat his example caught others after him and disciples came about him, I was affronted. Bernard of Quintavalle, who loved me also, unbuckled first his shoon. Egidius and Peter of Catane followed him. Sylvester

and Leo knotted soon the cord of lowliness about them. Already, above twelve disciples throng about this other Jesus. But Christ was not ungentle to Mary Magdalen. He suffered her to spill her ointments at His feet.

EMILIA. Hast thou tried him?

CLARE. Shall I hazard the bitter slight of his forgetfulness? Nay, liefer would I think that he remembers me and sometimes yearns after me.

CECILIA. Thou wilt be reconciled to it!

CLARE. An you had been beloved of Francis, you would linger on, likewise disconsolate. The flame of charity, that glorifies the souls it wraps, to me his lady had been dedicate. Never woman had known so rapturous a love. Within the girdle of the world beats there such another heart? That heart was privileged to me, my covenant. Me he would have loved, as he loves Jesus. So dwells my fancy and death is all my craving.

[She weeps and her friends lead her away.]

[Enter PETER, BERNARD, EGIDIUS.]

BERNARD. *[Sweeping.]* Brother Egidius, hast thou marked among the faithful . . .

EGIDIUS. *[Putting the seats in order.]* The Lady Clare! What grievous woe crosses her countenance!

PETER. Let her sanctify herself in God.

BERNARD. Her soul is meet to rest in Christ.

EGIDIUS. Natheless, she is the only being whom our celestial Brother has brought to suffering, and she alone has good ground to curse him!

PETER. She loves him always.

BERNARD. I marvel that our brother has thus forgotten her.

EGIDIUS. Would you that his heart, surcharged with charity, turned back to human loves?

BERNARD. I marvel that his spirit, so quick, to compassion and so steadfast therein, is not roused to graciousness before her soul so sore repining and a great while his.

PETER. His mind all winds about his God, nor is there any print of this his fleshly love, whose name is frailty. *[Enter the CITIZEN.]*

CITIZEN. Greeting, my brother! I am come to confess my sins.

EGIDIUS. Greeting! but no priests are we.

CITIZEN. Nay, verily, you are apostles. You pilot souls to God!

PETER. Yea, we are the dogs, but not the shepherds.

CITIZEN. Your fashion of preaching the Gospel sets me agape; for your observance is by deeds. Your habitation is in wooden hovels, and you beg your victuals. Behold the fruits of your example. *[He offers them a purse.]*

PETER. What is thy drift? A purse?

EGIDIUS. We are the lovers of our Lady Poverty.

CITIZEN. But my gifts are purposed for the poor.

PETER. We cannot take thy money.

CITIZEN. Devoted for men's welfare!

PETER. 'Twould foul our hands!

EGIDIUS. To finger it alone!

CITIZEN. Francis, your father, would better compass my intent !

BERNARD. O rich my brother, that I might venture to entreat thee . . .

CITIZEN. Surely !

BERNARD. I would conjure thee depart.

CITIZEN. Will you hinder me from seeing Brother Francis ?

BERNARD. Thou wilt set his sacred passion in a blaze, and he, for an atonement, will grievously mortify the flesh.

CITIZEN. Him, provoked to wrath, a very lamb !

EGIDIUS. Nought has he cursed upon this earth, this lamb, saving one thing, and for a surety the very possession which thou bringest. [*Enter FRANCIS.*

CITIZEN. Behold him ! I will speak to him ! Greeting, Brother Francis.

FRANCIS. Stranger and brother, greeting !

CITIZEN. I am a sinner !

FRANCIS. And I, likewise !

CITIZEN. Thou art a saint !

FRANCIS. [*Laughing.*] Ho, ho ! Forgive me, but thy fancy makes me merry. Brothers, have you heard ? I am a saint ! Ho, ho ! Harken, my stranger brother ; let me but show thee a Hebrew script and boast the cunning necromancy writ therein ; and thou wilt believe, through thy unlearning. Whereas thou deemest me a saint, thou knowest not the mark of saintliness.

CITIZEN. Nay, I know it and I greet it in thee !

FRANCIS. Hast thou seen a glow-worm in the

country when the night is down? Its lamp is beaming! So, thine eyes, accustomed to the glooms of our time, have discovered a worm. It is I.

CITIZEN. Thy words have stirred my conscience. I am rich!

FRANCIS. Alas, poor man, I pity thee! Thou art thrall unto a host of cares!

CITIZEN. I hoped to be of profit!

FRANCIS. Christ has prompted thee: yield and speedily.

CITIZEN. Thy brothers have turned me from my purpose.

FRANCIS. How befell it thee?

EGIDIUS. He charges us!

PETER. He dares!

EGIDIUS. The mischievous one!

FRANCIS. Jesus was charged, but held His peace.

PETER. My brother, we have spoken according to the rule.

FRANCIS. Excuse yourselves and God accuses you,

EGIDIUS. It is a hard thing thou sayst.

FRANCIS. Thy unmannerliness doth plead that he is justified.

PETER. We were sensible that this fellow would prick thy spleen.

FRANCIS. [*Effusively.*] And you desired to ward me from a sin. Brothers, your love is at full measure.

CITIZEN. I came bound upon a Christian quest.

FRANCIS. The more, then, thou art welcome!

CITIZEN. I would give unto the poor.

FRANCIS. So doing, the gift is God's!

CITIZEN. Do thou receive what thy brethren did reject!

FRANCIS. Empty this purse of thine within the hands of outcasts, and angels athwart the clouds will glorify thy name.

CITIZEN 'Twere better that alms were doled by thy, not my hands.

FRANCIS. Wilt thou suffer the gladness of giving, the sight of eyes asparkle with gratitude, to be snatched from thee? When so poor a man says to thee: "God recompense you!" verily, Heaven itself enregisters the debt.

CITIZEN. Were I myself to portion this my money, the poor would flock to batter at my door, and I should be constrained to give them more.

FRANCIS. O profitable compulsion!

CITIZEN. Therefore, brother, thou wilt not. . . .

FRANCIS. Nay! it would be mooted that we had coffered something of thy money. No longer may he preach the Gospel, who fingers gold.

CITIZEN. Is that thy final word? So be it, I and my gold will fare upon our way.

[He puts the purse down on a seat.]

FRANCIS. The peace of the Lord go with thee.

[Exit CITIZEN.]

EGIDIUS. This fellow was a devil, come to tempt us.

FRANCIS. Verily then, the devil has been robbed.

PETER. *[Catching sight of the purse.]* Not so, for his purse is here.

FRANCIS. The purse! Handle it not; but run

you and fetch him back ; ay, lay your hands upon him and fetch him back. He it was, who brought this unclean thing ; let him take it away and let no one foul his hands by it.

[Exit all but FRANCIS.]

FRANCIS. O infidel gold ! 'Tis thou that art the Devil, the sly friend Beelzebub and our unsleeping foe ! The sins of the world are prisoned in this purse. It is the bottle of the drunkard and the gamester's money-bag. Unclasp it and all evils would fly out, as from Pandora's box, to flood the world. It is the price of iniquity, the thirty silver pieces for the death of Christ !

[Enter BERNARD and EGIDIUS, bringing back the CITIZEN.]

FRANCIS. So thou art here, base brother, who defilest a place of holiness and peace . . .

CITIZEN. Thy comrades are rough-handed.

FRANCIS. Come, take thy pelf away.

CITIZEN. An I said thee nay ?

FRANCIS. I would cast thy gold upon a dung-hill, meet habitation for it.

CITIZEN. Why dost thou scorn the ruddy gold ? Good is done with it.

FRANCIS. Good is done from the heart.

CITIZEN. Ay, but many loaves and much raiment, much fuel and many physics, a world of ease and solace, lie herein, within my gold's capacity.

EGIDIUS. He speaks sooth !

BERNARD. We must acknowledge it.

CITIZEN. Thy friends are already persuaded.

Suffer it not that this gold be fastened in my chests again.

FRANCIS. Lord, deliver me from this temptation Come, my brethren, quit this froward.

CITIZEN. Stay! No man I know is like to thee. Verily thou art God's servant and I do yield to thee.

FRANCIS. Thou hast sorely vexed me; thou hast constrained my brethren to use thee violently. My brother, we crave thy pardon.

CITIZEN. Francis, a spirit without blemish has visited and quickened thee, and haply one day I shall return, into thy faith transfigured quite.

FRANCIS. Thou knowest the pledge that I enjoin upon my brethren: that all possessions without stint be cast away! To the rich the way is barred herein.

CITIZEN. Give me thy benison.

FRANCIS. Seek it with the outcasts. Comfort a beggar and his blessing will be more fruitful than a bishop's.

CITIZEN. But less fruitful than a saint's.

FRANCIS. Thou wilt stir my mirth as merrily at thy parting as at thy coming. Hast thou seen a saint provoked to fretfulness? An odd saint, verily! Natheless, receive the blessing of the poor little brother!

[Exit CITIZEN.]

BERNARD. Lo, the souls of men are ripened to the harvest at the breath of thy words. Already I can see the aureole circled round thy brow.

FRANCIS. Thou likewise, thou dost rave!

BERNARD. The stiff-necked are melted; the luke-

warm are kindled by the brand of thy love. Thou turnest their hearts to repentance, and all who hearken to thee go their way cheered and radiant. Full many I have seen that mourned their sins!

FRANCIS. My burden is: "Physician, heal thyself"; for I am weighed down with grisly desolation.

BERNARD. Thou—who art desponding never!

FRANCIS. He who knows God must needs be glad-some of heart, and melancholy is a grievous sin. Harken to me, ye twain. How would you speak of a man who, having discovered a treasure, scatters it at large to all men, unthinking of his friends of early days, unmindful of those who loved and served him, who comforted and sustained him?

EGIDIUS. Thy mind is set upon redeeming thy father?

FRANCIS. Would that I might! But, friend, thou art astray! Grant it that I had girded me for knighthood and fared with Gentile to Apulia, there to carve myself some share of a dukedom or a kingdom; should I not after the event be summoning to my side all who have loved me and entreated me gently, the while I was a merchant?

BERNARD. Doubtless!

FRANCIS. Verily, I am rich this day, in that I possess God. I am mighty, in that I commit myself into His hands, and I am contrite of heart and so exalted. The peace that comes from within, and the fullness of joy, are my dominion. Already room is chartered for me in the heavenly kingdom. And here am I revelling and self-pleased, crowned with virtue

and with gleefulness, and all forgetful of the past ! I am sundered from the being whose love gushed out for me, who gave herself in loveliness and innocence, who came that day with comforting words, an angel made flesh, to wipe away my shame from me. Ah, at St. Damian, I was but a sorry thing ! The children flung their stones. . . . She stood before me, stretching forth her hands.

BERNARD. Yea, thy thoughts are turned and turned again to Clare ! Let not thy tongue speak aught of her before the brethren, lest they be affronted.

FRANCIS. Wherefore ?

EGIDIUS. She is the rose of beauty !

FRANCIS. Is beauty a barrier to salvation ? Then is the very pageantry of life a snare . . . the fragrance of flowers and the shadows of the boskage ; the hues of fruits and the savour of meats ; the lustre of the sun and the lustre of the eye. Thou, Bernard, who didst unbuckle thy shoon, the first upon my precedent, examine the Master's Writ, and it will teach thee that our heart bestowed upon Him is not pent thereat, but dilates seraphically. Loving Him, we reach to loving all things. Was not a disciple His well-beloved ? My heart unchanging beats beneath the sackcloth, and for all time I am our Lady Clare's betrothed.

EGIDIUS. Brother, thou fallest out of grace !

BERNARD. Thy heart is clean, but will the world fathom it ?

FRANCIS. The world has fathomed nothing ; nay, not the very words of God. The virgin who singled

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me out for her most gracious favours might have chosen the governor of the city. Shall I be churlish and unfaithful in the Name of Christ? She feared no infamous tongues, when she did weep with one that was possessed. Clare acknowledged me in the face of men; I will acknowledge her before the angels. I am the warden of the shining path that leads unto salvation. Shall I shut out the soul that was the half of my soul? She wept over me at St. Damian; at St. Mary of the Angels I will pray for her.

BERNARD. Thou canst but pray.

FRANCIS. That her fortunes should be my fortunes, as honourable spouse. Such is my desire.

EGIDIUS. It may not be!

BERNARD. Thou canst not admit a woman among the brethren!

FRANCIS. The unattainable is a fabric embroidered by the heavenly spirits for their pastime.

BERNARD. Brother, behold the stone thy feet hath stumbled on!

FRANCIS. You are over-swift to judge me. Quit me! I would be alone with God.

[*Exeunt* BERNARD and EGIDIUS.]

[FRANCIS *at prayer.* Enter CLARE.]

CLARE. Lo, I am here, come back despite the call of seemliness and wisdom, spurred by an authority unconquerable. Nor can I endure the disorder that swells within me. I will speak unto this churl and heap upon his unfaithful head the rebukes clustered in my heart. He, the saviour of souls, shall know

that mine is cast away and brimming o'er with hate and melancholy. Behold him at his devotions, his countenance unclouded, while I, I am drooping in despair. . . . Francis!

FRANCIS. Thou!

CLARE. Do I tempt thee? Shun me and plead thy vows that thou mayst slip from answering me! Notwithstanding, thou wert mine. . . .

FRANCIS. Blessed be the Lord that brings thee back. O precious spirit, thy heart is a seraph's and thy face a flower. The birds have lent their grace to thee; the limpid fountains washed thee to their spotlessness; thy heart glitters as a diamond and Aurora hath thy smile. How could I shun thee, beloved? Long did I linger for thee, and cried to God that thou didst tarry long.

CLARE. Is it thou, Francis, that speakest? I hear the tender words of heretofore and the strain of the troubadour burgeons anew on the lips of the eremite. Hast thou forgotten? Dost thou not shrink from loveliness?

FRANCIS. To glorify Himself, God made thee beautiful. He matched upon thy luminous brow the radiance of His heaven; He lit the glow within thine eyes and lo! the stars have left the firmament. He shed upon thee grace and modesty, that in thy presence we might contemplate the angels.

CLARE. Thy voice's melody furrows through me, and my spirit reels within me. My poet, I came to thee with cankered heart and mouth stuffed with upbraidings. . . .

FRANCIS. I am sore requited with them.

CLARE. Oh, Francis, I am stricken to the heart!

FRANCIS. Sweet soul, turn thyself to Jesus.

CLARE. I turn towards thee; I am a woman only, and I love thee.

FRANCIS. Martha and Mary, what were they?

CLARE. Their eyes gazed upon Jesus, they sat at His feet; they looked upon Him and did Him service. Sometimes, perchance, they touched his hands.

FRANCIS. There is nothing that is like to thee, my Lady Clare; neither so sweet unto my sight, nor so precious to my heart.

CLARE. Thy lady of another day?

FRANCIS. My lady for all time.

CLARE. What sayst thou? Oh, take heed! Desire and anguish rive my heart, my heart all gashed to shreds and welling blood. Say nought but what is true, nor beguile a fondness such as mine. I am verily a beggar, and now that God has snatched thee from me, I have nought.

FRANCIS. Thy voice is the appeal of the world calling me back, but the gift of my soul has no return for ever. I am the thrall, enchanted with his thralldom.

CLARE. Thy voice throws open the portals of heaven, and I embrace the yoke that crushes me. As thou art God's, so I am thine.

FRANCIS. Sooner the stones of these walls will grow soft than my heart be frosted.

CLARE. My will is caught to flame and is trans-

figured, that I in loftier harmony may be blent with my beloved.

FRANCIS. Neither fire nor sword, neither grief nor death, might violate the tender cherishment in which my God enwraps me.

CLARE. Neither the fence of the world nor the fence of my kindred could shut me in from seeking my beloved.

FRANCIS. From the tops of heaven down to the earth, a thousand witching voices are suitors to my heart.

CLARE. I am deaf to the songs of youth and I do spurn my very loveliness.

FRANCIS. To love in fuller measure is my passion; but I cannot, for I am committed without stint to Love itself, and Creation swoons before the face of the Creator.

CLARE. The created thing is the mirror of the Divine Graciousness. Look therein.

FRANCIS. All things are blotted out beside this Love ineffable. Jesus alone could tell how it came to pass that I enjoy it.

CLARE. How shall it come to pass that I shall enjoy Francis?

FRANCIS. The sun is reft of light and heat; the teaching of the Cherubim and the hymns of the Seraphim are nought but vanities before His heart unspeakable.

CLARE. Beneath the potency of thy will, my flesh is stilled. O Cherub! teach me thy wizardry; O Seraph! knead my heart according to thy pleasure.

FRANCIS. Couldst thou but taste the flame which licks me up, thou wouldst take pity on my burning zeal in which all passions and all consciousness are drowned.

CLARE. Rebuke me not my rhapsody. No heart hath ever vanquished love.

FRANCIS. I have bartered all—the world, myself and thee, all, to purchase love. An it were mine, I'd lay the universe within the scales, that I might tingle once again with that unimaginable joy and be nought but a golden butterfly beneath His sovran breath.

CLARE. No more a lover and no more a woman. My soul shall writhe as metal in the fire, in ransom of thy love. I will be thine handmaid on the path to heaven and I will seek thee in the heart of Jesus, brother Francis, my brother.

FRANCIS. O my sister! A radiant thought is born within me. Of old, we were betrothed according to the world. Let us plight our faith anew, a faith upgathered for futurity.

CLARE. Take me for thy slave, that only I may see thee and bide by thy side. Thus will be my bliss.

FRANCIS. Clothed in uncouth raiment and with naked feet?

CLARE. Ay, vested in sackcloth and with nails beneath my feet.

FRANCIS. The world is thy sanctuary, and an abyss severs us asunder. Howbeit, one pace would surely span it.

CLARE. Alas! thou wilt strive forward.

FRANCIS. But thou canst overtake me. Thou art acquainted with the tragic chronicle of Tristram and of Isolt, and of how the knight did bring her, whom he loved, in all her beauty, to be the bride of royal Mark. Wilt thou that I may pledge thee to the King of Heaven? Wilt thou, O virgin, be dedicate to Christ, my Master paramount?

CLARE. I am thine own: do with me what thou wilt.

FRANCIS. If thou declare thyself the votaress of Poverty, if thou don the sackcloth that I wear, over thy loveliness, and if thou strip thyself of thy coronet of yellow hair, then I proclaim thee queen, and queen of an eternal Kingdom.

CLARE. Give me the mantle which shall make me thine, and lay hold upon the scissors.

FRANCIS. Clare, Clare, art thou fixed in thy desire?

CLARE. It is my single and my passionate desire!

FRANCIS. O sister! best beloved of all created things; mine eyes are dazed and hover, ecstatic, at the flashing lamp of thy soul. The world, the witness of this transcendent strife, would deem thee sacrificed and me, foolhardy; but I, who read within thy heart, am not disquieted. And surely thou wilt be the chastest and the most ardent of the brides of Christ, and thou wilt love Him as thou lovest me; thus His works shall be fulfilled through thee. I am the beggar man of Jesus; be thou the Beggar Lady.

CLARE. Thus I shall be the mirror of thy soul and the bride of thy thought.

FRANCIS. Thus, thou art dedicate to God.

CLARE. Thus, I am dedicate to thee.

FRANCIS. For the nonce, thy voice hath still an earthly stress.

CLARE. I shall be thy faithful echo.

FRANCIS. The heavenly glory will light upon thine eyelids and suffuse them.

CLARE. I will walk within thy hallowed shade.

FRANCIS. The betrothed of Jesus!

CLARE. The sister of Francis!

FRANCIS. Prostrate thyself before this altar, the emblem of thy triumph, O wise virgin! Unfold thy heart in righteousness unto the King of Glory. Make thy first confession to thy heavenly Lover.

[He leads her to the altar, where she prostrates herself. CLARE prays; FRANCIS rings the bell; enter PETER, EGIDIUS, BERNARD, LEO and others.]

PETER. What passes here?

EGIDIUS. What signifies this call?

LEO. To what purpose are we gathered thus together?

FRANCIS. *[Letting go the rope.]* Come, haste, my brethren all. Up, toll the bell and light the altar! Let your hands blossom with candles and chant your holiest hymns! This night, the Lord takes unto Himself a new bride and the poor of Jesus have found a sister.

BERNARD. Brother Francis, what is thine intent?

FRANCIS. To tender unto God the sweetest lily of the world.

EGIDIUS. What, without pause?

FRANCIS. Ay, forthwith.

BERNARD. Unto whom shall the Lady Clare administer her vows?

EGIDIUS. Thou hast not the authority of a bishop.

LEO. There is none present who is priest or deacon.

FRANCIS. Neither was Jesus.

EGIDIUS. The sacred canons . . .

FRANCIS. Love knows no ordinances.

LEO. Beware the ban of Rome.

FRANCIS. I shall have the well-liking of the angels.

PETER. Surely, the novitiate?

FRANCIS. When Jesus manifested Himself at St. Damian, He sent me not to con the Scriptures. He looked into my heart and had compassion on me. I do unto others as it has been done unto me. I have looked into the heart of this virgin and I have seen its innocence.

BERNARD. But, after the investiture, where shall our sister's dwelling be? She cannot continue with us. Shall we be witnesses of a bride of Christ straying haphazard?

EGIDIUS. Hast thou considered the wrath of Count Favorino? The father will come to claim his daughter back.

FRANCIS. Your wariness would win the flattery of our age. Ah! you are discreet, and your thought girdles the event. One matter and one only you forget, for Jesus bides with us and of a surety

watches o'er His bride. On our account what shall befall? We shall be soundly buffeted. And what of that? Full many have already required me to adventure among the Moors and brave their torments. So, to be drubbed will be fine discipline. I have suffered your counsels; grant me now your prayers. Make ready the shears and find a habit becoming to her state. Chant, my brethren, chant the hymn of the virgins.

[During the hymn FRANCIS goes up to the altar and prays; the brothers walk in procession to the door, carrying candles. They greet CLARE in her robe, with her hair unbound, and lead her to the altar and group themselves on either side.]

CHOIR. Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

Et exultavit spiritus meus; in Deo, salvatore meo.

Quia respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ;
ecco enim ex hoc

Beatam me dicent omnes generationes.

FRANCIS. O wise virgin, light thy lamp, for lo! thy Bridegroom cometh. Be quick to meet Him.

CLARE. Behold me, I am ready!

FRANCIS. Come!

CLARE. Lo! I am here and my heart paces before me. I yearn to look upon Thy countenance, albeit I tremble. O Lord, let Thy greeting be mild unto me and receive me, according to Thy heavenly word. Strengthen the will of Thy servant; she hath chosen the better part. Shed Thy loving kindness on her,

that she may ever fulfil Thy covenant and dwell in purity and temperance. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to make my lamp unquenchable, that I may walk in gladness before the face of the Bridegroom and with Him enter the gates of the heavenly Kingdom.

FRANCIS. Clare of Sciffi, dost thou deny the world and all the bonds thereof, dost thou deny the world and all the possessions thereof?

CLARE. For the love of Jesus, I deny them. I saw Him, I love Him and I have chosen Him. I do declare it.

FRANCIS. Come, O mine elect, and thou shalt be the riches of my heart. The King of kings hath solicited thy beauty. Abandon to the shears the harvest of all thine hair. Come: the winter is fordone; the turtle dove croons and blossoming vines puff out their savours. [*He cuts off her hair while speaking.*] Receive, O virgin, the symbolic ring, that yoketh thee to Jesus, Son of the Almighty Father. Thy title, it shall be the bride of the Most High. Serve Him with faithfulness and thou shalt receive the crown imperishable.

CLARE. I have chosen the King to Whom the angels minister, for my Bridegroom. I have chosen Him, Whose loveliness maketh dim the stars of heaven. I cast mine eyes upon the fruits of my desire; my aspiration is within my keeping and I am blest with my Belovèd through all eternity.

FRANCIS. Hallelujah!

BRETHREN. Hallelujah!

[COUNT FAVORINO and LORDS enter violently.]

FAVORINO. My daughter . . . where is my daughter ? [*The brethren crowded in front of the altar, hide her from view.*] These days, e'en ladies of gentle birth are abducted by the monks. Hey, hey, ye Franciscans, 'devil's brethren, answer me, you have hid my daughter here, as I know full well.

FRANCIS. [*Making the brethren move aside.*] Brother Count, behold thy daughter !

FAVORINO. Where, where is she ?

FRANCIS. Before thine eyes !

FAVORINO. [*Leans forward and drags CLARE violently to him.*] My daughter ! with shorn hair and clad in tatters ! O hapless one ! They have clipped thy comely locks. Alas, poor witless one ! [*He puts her behind him.*] And as for thee. [*He draws his sword.*] Mock penitent, fanatic, I will pack thee off to Paradise. [*He leaps forward with sword uplifted.*]

CLARE. My father, it was I who came ; it was I who . . .

FAVORINO. Hold thy peace ; thou art possessed. These rascals have beguiled thee in thy purblind belief, and surely I will visit it upon them. I will forbear to smite thee, Francis, thou fell madman, and thou loathly beggar. But I will have it that the hangman's arm shall lift about thy neck the cord that belts thy waist, upon the public place. For he who abducts a noble woman is doomed to be hanged, according to the law. Thou shalt bless with thy feet ere long, thou poor little brother of God, thou brazen miscreant.

FRANCIS. Brother Count, what thou sayst upon

my unworthiness matches my estimate; but I have acted in knightly wise. My lady divined the challenge of Jesus; the world was her tyrant and I delivered her!

FAVORINO. Thou seducer; 'tis I who have delivered her! I will fetch her home, and on the morrow she will curse thee for her shaven tresses. The defilement of it!

CLARE. My father, my vows are taken.

FAVORINO. Thy vows? The bishop only may receive them! Who gave thee authority to consecrate women? Thou art admitted to no Order, nay, not even the Franciscan. Thou art but an heretic and frantic, and the stake shall be thy destiny. Thou pretender to sacred prerogatives, I will likewise denounce thee to Rome. Hold thyself ready to be answerable before the Councils, charged with rape.

CLARE. My father, I submit to you, because I love you. But I do not sacrifice a daughter's duty, in that I give myself to God. You yourself, ere long, will yield me up my freedom. I will abide in patience until my heavenly Bridegroom shall move you to His will. Then I will fulfil my vows.

FRANCIS. Blessed be Thou, O Lord, that Thou hast filled her mouth with Thy wisdom!

[FAVORINO drags his daughter out, threatening
FRANCIS.

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

THE STIGMATA (1224)

(At St. Damian ; terrace of a small garden, above the hermitage.)

[CLARE and COUNT UGOLINO.

UGOLINO. Sister, you are sensible of the reverence I hold towards Francis and yourself. You are twin mirrors of the Gospel, without spot.

CLAIRE. My lord, sound Francis' praises, and I would lend my ears unceasing. For myself, I have no desert.

UGOLINO. Your brows are circled by the self-same aureole. The church will hallow on its altars him who would be lowliest—the Franciscan and his most worshipful sister Clare, mother of the Ladies of Poverty.

CLAIRE. The wreaths of Heaven are braided by the angels!

UGOLINO. And bestowed by the Church!

CLAIRE. Twelve years I have borne the habit of Jesus unfretted by disquiet and gleefully withal. My father wrested me from the altar, strewn with my hair, and I tarried for his consent, according to my bond, that thereby I might fulfil my vows. He pitted his strength against my mission, nor had I further

ordeal. Francis was suzerain of my woman's heart and Francis, yielding his ward, tendered it to God!

UGOLINO. O miracle of faith!

CLARE. O miracle of love!

UGOLINO. It chanced, when Bernadone knotted the cord of lowliness about him, that dreamers of evil dreams, new-fangled blasphemers and false penitents infested Italy, confounding the people's conscience. These owls were scattered by a shaft of brilliant light and, by the virtue of a single man, the heresy, despoiling the south of France, is stamped from our soil.

CLARE. My lord, full well I know it.

UGOLINO. If I hymn the glory of Francis thus, to observe whose precedent has sometime been my aspiration, so much I take account of him, it is to give you ample earnest of my feelings, ere I entreat your succour.

CLARE. My succour . . . lord?

UGOLINO. I would have you sway his meek stubbornness.

CLARE. In his presence, I am nought but a smiling "Amen."

UGOLINO. It is at my bidding that you intervene.

CLARE. "Twixt God and Francis?

UGOLINO. "Twixt Francis and Rome!

CLARE. He is before the Pope at this very hour, and is to receive his Orders.

UGOLINO. The saints are shy of governance and chiefest, the people's saints. Suffer me to urge a galling service, experience's against the visionary's plea. Consider the Church, how at its pinnacle there is the

monarch. The pomp of the Cæsars has been the immemorial heritage of the Pope; he is the paramount of an earthly kingdom, with an army, with a court, with stewards and with minions. For myself, I dwell within a palace and am of princely station. The Christian who should see us fare in company, Brother Francis, clothed in sackcloth, lowly and with naked feet, Ugolino the cardinal, clothed in purple, what would he say? That one of the twain was surely mad! Can the same doctrine face these contrary ways?

CLARE. The rule of my Order forbids me cast a judgment.

UGOLINO. But the vulgar judge and censure. Poverty full-measured is beyond our practice and the Franciscans throw all the other members of the Church into disrepute.

CLARE. Howbeit, Innocent has deigned his blessing.

UGOLINO. By word of mouth.

CLARE. Is the Pope's consent required, to follow after Jesus?

UGOLINO. Verily, thus is the argument of the heretics! For men I grant you a rigorous poverty. That were no hurt, for they can work and they can beg. But women, roofless and hungered; that were folly.

CLARE. Howbeit, so it is!

UGOLINO. When Francis shall turn his face back unto God, he will, perforce, awake from this his rapturous trance.

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CLARE. What other testimony is more acceptable to heaven than to condemn the world and all its works? Caught in the flood of the age, how shall we magnify the glory of Paradise? Except by the fruits of example how shall we conjure men to lose the world? Example is the crucible of admonishment; by example are men persuaded and example lures them to the fold. He who would preach, let him first declare: "Do as I am doing! Be as I am!"

UGOLINO. Poverty. . . .

CLARE. Poverty is virtue's nurse and neighbours perfection. The pilgrim, lifted of his load, scales the craggy steep—untroubled!

UGOLINO. On the shores of a lake, in Galilee, simple fisher-folk visioned the coming of peace upon earth, poem of their desire, flushed horizon of their hopes. The work of Christ is wrought by unity and power. To weld and dominate the world, is the world's salvation. Unity, unity, the universe travails to achieve it, all men ungathered to the same hand, all owning fealty. Your hero's impositions have no toughness; Francis . . .

CLARE. Francis is bondservant to Jesus!

UGOLINO. All the fantastics are suitors to the same. But to the Church must they bow the knee. I am resolved to grant you a convent.

CLARE. Possession is an earnest of apology. Thus do men plead the laws and fall to the arbitrament of war, in the name of Him Who had not the veriest hole wherein to lay Him down. Poverty is the sister of the heavenly freedom. She is the way of salvation

made straight. She stood by the manger and crouched by the tomb. She soared to Heaven with her transcendent consort!

UGOLINO. Sister Clare, it must be that you consent to my determinance and that your lips should utter it!

CLARE. My Lord, suffer me to hold my peace!

UGOLINO. Nay, have your say.

CLARE. Deem you not that the bride of the spirit is the peer of the bride of the flesh in fidelity and chastity; that faith sunk in Jesus Christ is as holy as the marriage oath? Answer me, my lord, is it not so?

UGOLINO. I am mazed by your words!

CLARE. [*With much violence.*] Your own do turn me sick. Will you, O bishop-cardinal, prick me to adultery?

UGOLINO. Forget you my estate and yours?

CLARE. 'Tis you yourself forget it, lord! Her, who sacrificed her all, her beauty and her youth, her hopes of love and hearth, to be bride unto a spirit, to be mated to an aspiration, her you seek to inveigle into temptation. You are importuned of the Devil and altered to a base seducer. Are you so bold as to require of Sister Clare the betrayal of Francis' apostolate?

UGOLINO. How she rails and runs counter to common dignity!

CLARE. Ah, you have galled me sore, where alone the hurt may touch me! To twist me to your purpose against that being precious in my sight, exalted, and next divinity, of whom I am the mirror,

the disciple! Oh, it were a vile contriving! His cause, forsooth, outvies your own; but were he amiss, yet would I follow him infatuate.

UGOLINO. I hold you reverently—my warrant of it—that I am patient to your wrath. Howbeit, there will come a day, peradventure near at hand, when Francis will pass into his rest. Whom then will you obey?

CLARE. Him, him always, dead or living!

UGOLINO. You are, my sister . . .

CLARE. I am a Franciscan.

UGOLINO. And I had hoped to pair the Poor Clares with Dominic's new-founded Order!

CLARE. [*With irony.*] Likewise he is minded to dominate the world, for its salvation.

UGOLINO. Dominic is a worthy compeer to Francis.

CLARE. I am a woman who loves, no deliberating justicer.

UGOLINO. I go, sore lamenting this our conference. . . .

CLARE. My lord, you leave me drowned in melancholy. Like as the birds trill the praises of God in their fashion, so the longing of hearts is to freedom, for the better loving of God.

UGOLINO. I deemed I spoke unto a nun.

CLARE. Nay, I am but a woman who loves.

UGOLINO. Farewell, my sister.

[*Exit UGOLINO. CLARE follows him at a distance.*]

[*Enter the Sisters OECILIA, GIOVANNA, MONICA and EMILIA.*]

CECILIA. The Cardinal has departed with shadowed countenance.

EMILIA. And sister Claire wears her frowning mask.

MONICA. What has befallen?

GIOVANNA. You prying jades!

EMILIA. Sooth, is not this the hour of relaxation?

CECILIA. There is nought can grieve our mother, so much as to contravene our precepts.

EMILIA. His Eminence holds no colour with poverty.

MONICA. [*Quoting.*] "The sisters shall have no appurtenances, neither house . . ."

[*Enter CLARE.*

CECILIA. Greeting, mother!

CLARE. Dear sisters, greeting!

GIOVANNA. We are going to water the flowers.

[*Exit, with one of the Sisters.*

EMILIA. Record to us some exploit of our founder meet for remembrance.

CLARE. Even now, he entreats an indulgence of the Pope, on like terms with that beyond the seas—pardon for all transgressions.

MONICA. Mother, relate to us how he left the camp of the crusaders before Damietta and had audience with the Sultan.

CLARE. Another time! Grievous things have come to pass within the city.

CECILIA. Mother, tell us of these tidings.

CLARE. There is dissension 'twixt the Bishop and the Governor.

MONICA. [*Archly.*] And the Bishop has excommunicated his adversary.

CLARE. Yea, alas, and the Governor in turn has banned the exchange of merchandise and the drafting of any deed with the Church folk. But the twain have referred the matter to the arbitrament of our father.

[*Enter FRANCIS. The Sisters seeing him, slip quietly away.*]

CLARE. Brother!

FRANCIS. Fair sister!

CLARE. What bringest thou from Rome?

FRANCIS. The palm of victory exultant. Poverty is vanquisher and I bring a plenary indulgence! Whosoever shall come to the Portiuncula, shall receive absolution upon condition that he confess his sins, without dole and without offering save penitence alone, ay, and without a groat, without a groat.

CLARE. This indulgence matches that of the crusade. Thou hast doughtily prevailed.

FRANCIS. It was the will of Jesus. The barons who yet withstood us, have yielded. The villeins are set free throughout the land.

CLARE. Thou hast tendered freedom to the land of thy birth.

FRANCIS. The lord of Gubbio alone is stubborn yet.

CLARE. He whom they dub "The Wolf" on the score of his brutishness—a man fell-hearted.

FRANCIS. We must despair of no man's salvation. But for my pride, I should have won the Sultan for my convert.

CLARE. Thy pride, thou poor little brother ! Dost thou mock me ?

FRANCIS. Alas, hast thou seen perchance the herald of a mighty prince ; how he will strut and preen himself, an he were, in his conceit, the very prince himself ? The sackcloth of the monk smothers not vanity, and the ambassador of Christ oft arrogates unto his paltry self the semblance of the Divine Master. The Sultan graciously inclined himself to my discourse, but pride did make me giddy. I spoke in the name of Jesus and cleped Mahomet knavish and a cheat. Whereat he constrained me hold my peace.

CLARE. The sons of Dominic might profit by thy words.

FRANCIS. Surely, they who bring affliction on the Lamb are piteous.

CLARE. Wilt thou censure them ?

FRANCIS. To stamp the body of the soul with tribulation is unlawful in the sight of Christ ; the martyr for us all. I meditate a gathering of our brothers and our sisters in this place and I am minded this day to sup with my kindred and take the headship of my Round Table.

CLARE. That were gladness for all ; but we have no provender.

FRANCIS. Jesus will provide.

[*Enter the BRETHREN ; BERNARD, EGIDIUS,
PETER, LEO, ANGELO and others.*]

FRANCIS. My sheep, my sheep . . . Bernard . . .

Egidius . . . Peter . . . Leo. [*He embraces them and goes to ANGELO.*] Wherefore art thou cast down?

ANGELO. My father, I have sinned.

FRANCIS. Leave thy discomfort inward 'twixt thyself and God. Be gladsome here before me and thy brethren. What shall the men of the age report of us, an they see Christ's children fretful and overcast?

ANGELO. The Devil . . .

FRANCIS. Blitheness of heart will hunt him away! Are we the disinherited? Nay laugh and be merry! Behold brother Juniper; his lively fancy doth vouch how comfortable is the way of salvation. The artist paints the picture of the Madonna with what loveliness he may. The servant of God is like unto a painting; to magnify Jesus is his bounden task.

[*A noise without.*]

[*The COUNT OF GUBBIO enters aggressively.*]

COUNT. So, I see thee, thou fantastic dreamer, subverter of lay privileges, deliverer of the villeins in the name of Jesus Christ! Knowest thou my name? "The Wolf," I am called. Myself, alone, have thwarted thy follies; yea, in all Umbria, I alone have kept my villeins stiff in bondage.

FRANCIS. Brother Count . . .

COUNT. I am come to win a wager; for I have sworn to blaspheme Jesus and before thy face. 'Twill be right merry to see thy wry countenance.

FRANCIS. Brother wolf, I pity thee . . .

COUNT. Thou pitiest me?

FRANCIS. The man hath suffered much, who is turned into a wolf.

COUNT. Who hath told thee? What knowest thou?

FRANCIS. Lo, I can read within thine heart.

COUNT. It is o'erflooded with hatred against God.

FRANCIS. Brother wolf, thou dost delude thyself.

COUNT. Fetch me a crucifix, a relic. Show me some hallowed gewgaw, thou monk, and I will blaspheme with the very damned.

FRANCIS. [*His arms in the shape of a cross on his breast.*] Behold!

COUNT. What is thy drift?

FRANCIS. Behold the token thou solicitest.

COUNT. A true cross is my meaning.

FRANCIS. The Christian spreading his two arms, spreads the truest.

COUNT. Affectioned fellow!

FRANCIS. Brother wolf, brother wolf; the arms of Jesus yearn to thee; He knoweth thy soul's injury and that another in thy stead, had sunk yet deeper.

COUNT. How now, what knowest thou concerning me?

FRANCIS. Grief hath stricken thee evil of heart.

COUNT. Wherefore has thy God filched me of my child, my son, my well-beloved, hope of my ancient lineage? Prayers I have yielded up, vows and offerings I have paid; my life I would have forfeited and now he . . .

FRANCIS. Sojourns in Heaven, with the angels!

COUNT. I am no believer in thy heaven.

FRANCIS. Thou weepest ; therefore thou believest.

COUNT. Distracted loon !

FRANCIS. He was goodly and gentle.

COUNT. A very Child Jesus.

FRANCIS. He would fold his little hands to pray.

COUNT. [*Moved.*] Ah !

FRANCIS. [*Embracing him*] Ah, I am the partner of thy sorrow, a father's sorrow, witness of the dying of his son.

[*FRANCIS weeps.*]

COUNT. Thou weepest ! Out of my rage and my distemperature, I have done evilly.

FRANCIS. But thy child on high hath prayed for thee and, poor wolf, poor brother, thou art forgiven !

COUNT. Thou hast bestowed thy tears upon my son. I am beholden to thee !

FRANCIS. Seeing him once again in Heaven, what gladness is in store for thee !

COUNT. Alas, that I might trust it !

FRANCIS. O hapless father, hearken to thy love. Love holds all truth within its bourn. Dogmas, theories, testimonies, words, all are but the clamour of illusion. Hearken to the oracle that cannot err ; let the heart speak.

COUNT. Verily the comforter, his name is saintliness. Perchance thou art a wizard. O being, fantastical and gentle, thy hand doth rest upon my rankling sore and thou hast eased me.

FRANCIS. Nay, this is no saintliness or wizardry. Within the depths of thy heart I saw the innocent

smile of him thou mournest. The spirit of thy child hath spoken through the accents of thy voice.

COUNT. Wilt thou that I grant thee and thy brethren an estate or vineyard?

FRANCIS. Rather fulfil the supplication of thy beloved son.

COUNT. And that?

FRANCIS. Had he lived, he doubtless had achieved renown. It is the bitterness of those who die untimely, to have done no flaming or imperious deeds and whose memory leaves no trail behind.

COUNT. Alas, I cannot fashion it that he should have honour.

FRANCIS. Ponder awhile. Devise some enterprise wherein to steep his name.

COUNT. I offer thee to raise a convent.

FRANCIS. Nay, nay, find else acceptable to God.

COUNT. It is well! To shrine the memory of Romuald my son, I do renounce my every privilege. I, the wolf, set free my villeins in his name.

ALL. . . . Huzza for the Count!

FRANCIS. Brethren, he who shall ease the heart, he verily is the saint. This hour the Count has granted freedom unto the thousands of his bondmen; therefore he is our overlord. Prostrate yourselves before him, accomplisher of the works of Jesus. [*All the Franciscans kneel; to the COUNT.*] Lay thy hands upon them and upon me!

COUNT. Oh Francis! [*He raises him.*]

FRANCIS. This hour, the fullness of a boundless grace lights upon thy head. The brows of thy son are

garlanded and the Child Jesus Himself plants His kiss upon thy child.

COUNT. [*Embracing him.*] Saint Francis!

[*FRANCIS accompanies him and the Franciscans arise and make a stir as FRANCIS comes back again.* Exit COUNT.]

BERNARD. [*To FRANCIS.*] A woman begs alms and we have nought to give,

FRANCIS. The candle-sticks and altar-cloth?

EGIDIUS. The chapel has been stripped entire.

BERNARD. This woman is mother to one of thy sons—Rufus.

FRANCIS. A Franciscan's mother? It behoves us give. Ah, the New Testament which we use for matins.

PETER. The sole book remaining to us.

FRANCIS. Is not the law writ within our hearts? The proper reading of the Gospel is the exercising of it. So, I bid you give!

[*Enter the GOVERNOR.*]

FRANCIS. Sir!

GOVERNOR. Brother Francis, I have appointed thee my arbiter and thy determinance shall bear the sanction of the law. Hearken! The bishop hath wrought me mischief.

FRANCIS. Oh!

GOVERNOR. Being he is a churchman, he doth presume he will overawe thee. But thou, thou art incarnate justice. Were I the offender, would I dare to come into thy presence?

FRANCIS. Albeit Guido's station is of so singular a consequence, thou art the mirror of the citizens.

Verily, it is a match 'twixt the body and the soul. I am sorrowful for thee, beloved city.

[Enter BISHOP GUIDO.]

FRANCIS. [Going up to him.] Good, my lord!

BISHOP. This day I am no lord of thine. I would that thou solve my disputation with the Governor.

FRANCIS. Lord Bishop! [Bows.] Your Excellence! [Bows to GOVERNOR.] I sore lament this the broil between you and I am moved to sharp perplexity. Inasmuch as I am Christian, I reverence the Bishop; inasmuch as citizen, honour befits the Governor. Furthermore, pleading [To the BISHOP] that thou, the head, [To the GOVERNOR] and thou, the arms, tarry not to make your peace without more debate, I do declare the wishes of the people of Assisi. [To the BISHOP.] Dost thou entertain aught of hatred against him?

BISHOP. Nay, but I was affronted. . . .

FRANCIS. In your heart, already you have forgiven. [To the GOVERNOR] Dost thou covet the prelate's death?

GOVERNOR. Heaven forfend! Let him but acknowledge that he errs.

FRANCIS. [Aside.] They distract the city, who might smoothe it at a word. . . .

BISHOP. I cannot slough my ceremony.

GOVERNOR. Nor I, my state as foremost citizen.

FRANCIS. Doubtless! Therefore I will deliver judgment.

GOVERNOR. Good brother, thou art blind as to what this occasion portends.

FRANCIS. It doth concern the quiet of Assisi. Reckon it not that I, poor wretch, can estimate your several complaints. [*In a whisper to the BISHOP*] He doth confess his charge. He declared it on his coming. [*To the GOVERNOR*] He doth allow his testiness. Brawling, my lords, would belittle you, whereas quick harmony will pluck your dignity into security. Forgive, forthwith, the twain of you, that none may know on which the wrong is fathered. [*As if both had consented.*] Blessed be Jesus, for the sake of those who forgive, in the love of Thy Name, for the sake of those who endure sorrow and affliction. How excellent are the peaceful; from Thy hands, O Most High, they shall receive the crown of righteousness.

GOVERNOR. [*Much moved.*] Verily, thou art forgiven, lord Bishop. Behold me, steeled to every hap, for love of Jesus and His servant Francis.

BISHOP. [*Coming forward.*] Established in my supremacy, it beseems me to be meek. In that my disposition is of so mettlesome a quality, I crave thy pardon, Excellency.

[*The BISHOP and GOVERNOR embrace.*]

FRANCIS. Go, carry the tidings of this your amity unto the city.

BISHOP. Francis, thou art gathered unto them God smiles upon.

FRANCIS. Nay, but you would have reconciled yourselves without me.

GOVERNOR. O blessed lowliness!

[*Exit BISHOP and GOVERNOR.*]

FRANCIS. [*Looking up to the sky.*] Behold the lark

poised over us, that wears the monkish cowl, her unassuming livery of feathers, hued of earth; her sustenance, the casual grains picked from the dust. But lo, my brethren, how she chirrup in the firmament! Thus is our scripture.

BERNARD. [*To FRANCIS.*] Art thou hungered?

EGIDIUS. An brother Juniper bring us not to eat. . . .

FRANCIS. Twelve years have slipped us by, nor is any brother dead of hunger.

ANGELO. An it please thee, I will go beg.

FRANCIS. Hearken to me: the privilege of need is just, but labour hath its obligation. Go into the fields and be numbered with the harvesters. Sharing their labours, you shall share their victuals. Hew wood and carry water in the towns. Earn your bread and do not beg it, saving in the last extremity. [*To A BROTHER.*] Young brother, art thou minded to speak to me?

BROTHER. To have a psalter would be comfort to me.

FRANCIS. Eftsoons, thou wouldst a breviary. Thou wilt sit like to a prelate in his chair, and say: "Fetch me my book of hours." It is enjoined upon the true Franciscan to eschew commodities. Behold the true breviary—lowliness.

[*He picks up a handful of earth and rubs the BROTHER'S head with it.*

[*Enter JUNIPER laden with loaves.*

FRANCIS. I have well said. Who gave the bread in such abundant measure?

JUNIPER. This forenoon, in the market, a peasant

sought one to knock his walnuts down and many a man has broke his neck already, so lofty is the tree. The task that is shunned by all, is meet for a Franciscan. Here is bread for all.

FRANCIS. Little brothers, this example profits us. Earn your bread, each one, by the sweat of your brow. [*Enter CLARE and the POOR CLARES.*]

FRANCIS. 'Tis passing sweet to dwell in company and brotherhood.

BERNARD. Father, bless our bread, for we are hungered.

FRANCIS. Bread that is fruit of toil, is consecrate. Eat, eat, my brethren and bethink you of the wonder of the grain, of the seed cast within the ground, that lifts its head anon upon a golden stem. Likewise our soul, that lurks within the body, shoots to the ear, ripened to the heavenly harvesting.

CLARE. I entreat thee, Francis, take of this bread.

FRANCIS. The rich do greatly languish after music at their banquetings and I, my brethren, will play the troubadour. Lend ear unto my strain, hymned to the glory of created things.

[*FRANCIS sings :*]

O Most High, Almighty, good Lord God, unto Thee
praise, glory, honour and all adoration !

O Most High, they are meet for Thee alone, and no
man is worthy to utter Thy Name.

Praised be my Lord God with all His creatures ; and
chiefest my brother the sun, that settest the day

and settest the light thereof. Comely is he
and excellent with radiancy and splendour.

O Lord, he is Thy token unto us!

Praised be my Lord for my sister the moon and for
the stars; the which He hath sealed in the
firmament; luminous and tender and full of
comeliness.

Praised be my Lord for my brother the wind, for air
and cloud, the sky and the tranquillity thereof
and all weathers; by the which Thou upholdest
all creatures.

Praised be my Lord for my sister water, the which is
serviceable unto us and lowly and delicate and
clean.

Praised be my Lord for my brother the fire; by
the which Thou lightest the darkness of the
night; august is he and joyful and sturdy and
valorous.

Praised be my Lord for my sister the earth, that
doth nurture and cherish us and doth gather us
the fruits thereof, even to overflowing.

[FRANCIS *begins to fall into an ecstasy.*

O Most High, Almighty, good Lord God, unto Thee
praise, glory, honour and all veneration.

[FRANCIS *remains still and transfigured. All
the FRANCISCANS and POOR CLARES,
seeing their father rapt, rise and go out
in meditative silence. CLARE alone
remains.*

FRANCIS. [Coming to from his ecstasy and looking
about him.] Where are my brethren?

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CLARE. They did see that Jesus spoke to thee and out of reverence withdrew.

FRANCIS. Verily I am self-doting and drowned in inexpressive rapture, communing with my gentle Saviour and my memory plays truant to my family flocking about me! They every one behold this my trance, wherein they have no lot and justly rate me, girdled overclose with heaven's grace. Yea, such imaginings haply may daunt their gladness. But who may front the magic of such ravishment, the incorporate majesty of such aspiration, that hath no name saving in eternity.

CLARE. If thy Lord doth summon thee, how shalt thou withstand Him?

FRANCIS. Lo, I am bound, bound to my apostolate and laggard time holds me from the fulfilment thereof.

CLARE. Ugolino the Cardinal came, desiring thee. . . .

FRANCIS. That the Franciscans renounce Poverty! He apprehends the Church as he would a kingdom. Howbeit he is my brother and I his likewise.

CLARE. His was the likeness of an adversary.

FRANCIS. Nay, my sister, his zeal hath true warranty, albeit he confounds Jesus with Jehovah. Long years, peradventure for all time, before the eyes of the world, the faithful of Jesus will encounter the faithful of Moses. Therefore I would fashion proven Christians. Alas, too soon, I shall depart.

CLARE. O dolorous reflection!

FRANCIS. Lo, our sister Death looms forth and

drifts upon me. Nay, be not affrighted; before us streams eternity and smiles.

CLARE. Upon the threshold of Paradise, thou takest thy leave of me for ever, thy glory setting us asunder. Jesus will hold His arms to thee and set thee by His side, so nigh to Him that scarcely I shall see thee, a beggar, mingled in the throng of the elect.

FRANCIS. My radiant sister, thou dost forget thine own validity. Thou hast tendered unto God a treasure grudged thee by the world. Silk stuffs for sackcloth thou hast cast away, and disdainful of the age thou hast abashed it. Twelve seasons since thy nuptials, the earth hath solemnized the rejoicing of Bethlehem and thy example hath garnered a goodly harvest. Thou hast established thy family immaculate, whose price flushes the world, nor are the daughters of Clare to be singled from the sons of Francis. And verily thy daughters shall be proved the more faithful. For the lesser brethren will be masters of convents and of vineyards, treading the paths of the sons of Dominic in their dizziness of lust.

CLARE. Thus thy prophecy. I shall behold thy counsels violated. I shall have wept thee and thy works, nor shall I be joined to thee world without end, everlasting.

FRANCIS. I am unlettered and few are the books that I have conned. Yet may I unriddle the holy mysteries, so close my heart has beaten to God. Surely I will cheer thy anxious heart. God made man and made him perfect and fashioned Clare and

Francis a single being indivisible. Sin it was that severed Eve from Adam. Sex perishes at the day-spring of eternity and man and woman are melted into one. Divisions wither and they are twain no more. Clare and Francis are two chrysalids, from which will emanate a single butterfly.

CLARE. Exalted faith! O ravishment of thought!

FRANCIS. An angel will gush from the little brother and the Lady of Poverty.

CLARE. From our hearts crumbled to dust, our one heart is destined to be born.

FRANCIS. Our lineaments melted into a single countenance.

CLARE. I shall see by thine eyes.

FRANCIS. And by thy voice shall I sing.

CLARE. And there shall be peace.

FRANCIS. Nay, ecstasy.

CLARE. O holy mystery.

FRANCIS. Rapturous hereafter.

[He enters into a trance.]

[CLARE, held by a sudden awe, suddenly goes out. Night falls. FRANCIS alone.]

FRANCIS. O Love, wherefore hast Thou chafed my spirit? My heart leapeth in my bosom! It flameth with a very great fervour, even as wax in the furnace; yea, it dieth at the heating thereof.

I am spent, I am eaten up with love; Thy servant yearneth after more abundance of love and verily there is no more to give; lo, the measure

of my love o'erfloweth, neither may the fever of mine adoration be abated.

Surely, I am beside myself, O Wisdom Almighty; I am stripped naked of myself and Thou dost clothe me anew.

Even as the iron is melted in the fire, even as the air beareth the livery of the sun, my soul is flushed and ruddy with love.

The voices of the firmament and the voices of the earth cry out unto me: Love thou the Love that loveth thee; it is engendered that it might be given unto thee.

Thou art born of love and not of flesh; thou hast walked like unto a man that is drunken and love hath piloted thee in bondage.

Thou stoodest at the gates of the Temple; Thou didst cry with a loud voice: "Come, he that is parched with thirst and I will give him to drink; I will fill him until he be filled!" And that all men might be gathered into Thy single clasp, Thou didst go up on the cross!

At the foot of thy gallows, O King of Glory, behold Thy servant. That I might love Thee unto the fullness that Thou lovest me; that I might suffer unto the fullness of Thy sufferings for them!

I kiss Thy mangled feet, Thy hands that are pierced and Thy bosom that bleedeth kindle me to adoration!

Make me to taste the Passion's dreadfulness and the love of Thy sacrifice, that the Christian may be transfigured into another Christ.

O Love, brand me with Thy brand; O Love, pierce

Thou my hands ; O Love, pierce Thou my feet ;
O Love, rend Thou my bosom ; O Love, make me
to die with love.

[FRANCIS, swooning, falls on his knees, with
his arms on the Cross. Five luminous
rays from above strike his feet, his hands
and his side ; and the five Stigmata are
visible, bleeding.]

CURTAIN.

ACT V

THE MADONNA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1226

*(In front of Our Lady of the Angels. There are spears
above the thicket hedge.)*

[ELIAS and BERNARD.

BERNARD. Our father Francis is at rest?

ELIAS. Alas! he is at the extremity of suffering.

BERNARD. These two years, the while he bears the Divine Stigmata upon him, his life is torment! Inscrutable visitation! Jesus descended in the likeness of a sacred bird, unfurling the six wings of the Seraphim. A lustre streamed from every wound; a lambent, flaming light piercing, as a nail, his feet and hands! A spear invisible rent his side and the Christian was transformed to a living crucifix.

ELIAS. He bends his will to cloak the heavenly grace! His flesh twisted in anguish, his soul rejoices.

BERNARD. His soul bleeds likewise.

ELIAS. He lives anew the agony of Calvary.

BERNARD. According to thy mind, brother Elias, wherein lay the chiefest gall?

ELIAS. To be betrayed and quit the world, ere His word had been signified unto it.

BERNARD. Therein our master is like unto the heavenly Master.

ELIAS. Who hath done this perfidy?

BERNARD. Thyself and the Cardinal.

ELIAS. Brother Bernard, I am the Vicar of the Order and in me is vested all authority to punish thee.

BERNARD. Ah! privilege doth readily declare itself. Of yore, love was suzerain here. Thou hast obedience, but Francis had love.

ELIAS. Arraign the Judases, an they betray thy master; or, verily by thy silence, thou art privy to their treason.

BERNARD. My master is at the gate of death; let him die in peace. These furtive notions do sap his work so truly kindled of Heaven and he divines it, but his trust is in thy fealty and in the integrity of Ugolino.

ELIAS. Brother Bernard, I mind me thou wert the first to unbuckle thy shoon and I challenge thee—prove thy slander.

BERNARD. Rome craves no heroes, but soldiers, sworn henchmen and stout minions, fellows all in service, conformable to one shibboleth. Francis, fervid of heart, wore a semblance of heresy. Men moved him that his frailty of body did undo his validity and that Heaven, branding him, thrust him from life's stress. He, the blessed one, in lowliness of heart, doubted of himself and sore lamenting, delivered his governance into thy hands.

ELIAS. Therefore, in thine eyes, I am an unworthy monk.

BERNARD. Thou art no son to Francis.

ELIAS. What distinction seest thou?

BERNARD. Unhappy! to whom the flower and the grass are one, the wheat and the tares. A son to Francis is a soul, intoxicate with Love; a monk is the creature of his rule. The world will ever have its monks, and never, never will it see another Bernadone. [*A tumult.*] Men-at-arms at Our Lady of the Angels? Shame, shame upon thee.

ELIAS. I might not hold them off. There is rumour of some hare-brained conspiracy and the Perugians have sworn to carry off the body of our father.

BERNARD. Ah, the hubbub grows apace!

ELIAS. Alas, I am impotent to hold them to my discipline.

BERNARD. They fight. [*He goes up the stage.*]

[*The Men of Assisi appear, jostled by the Perugians.*]

MAN OF ASSISI. Hold, ye pilferers, you shall not enter.

MAN OF PERUGIA. Heaven is the prize of the valorous and the holy man likewise.

MAN OF ASSISI. Never, while we live, shall you filch our Saint!

ELIAS. Hearken to me, I . . .

BERNARD. Thou art the veriest cipher in their eyes.

ELIAS. I will threat them with the ban of the Church.

BERNARD. O Francis, such is he who wields thy sceptre!

ELIAS. Brother Bernard, I have full warrant to punish.

BERNARD. Stay, ere thou defile this blessed sackcloth, until he, who vested it with lustre, has passed away.

MAN OF PERUGIA. At them, at them! To the assault!

MAN OF ASSISI. Get you gone; 'ware pikes!

MAN OF PERUGIA. The place is ours and none shall oust us from it.

ELIAS. I am the Grand Prior.

MAN OF PERUGIA. Prior! There is no insufficiency of such!

ELIAS. [*To BERNARD.*] What now?

BERNARD. Behold!

[*SISTER CLARE appears on the threshold.
She remains motionless.*]

ELIAS. Sister Clare!

BERNARD. She comes and the event shifts; she looks and it is enough.

ELIAS. Strange consequence!

BERNARD. Nay, love is sovereign and all-powerful.

CLARE. [*From the threshold.*] Put up your pikes, back with your swords to their scabbards. [*She steps down.*] Are you pagans? [*All doff their hoods.*] Brother Francis lives, I declare it to you. But did he know of this your desecration, past all belief,

O ye who carry warfare even unto his pillow, he would be dead of very anguish and ye, each one of you, the murderers of a Saint!

MAN OF PERUGIA. Lady Clare, we crave your pardon! Some delirium has possessed us. The body of a Saint and of a Saint such as he! Think upon it—surely, no mean fortune for a city. Pilgrims will throng unto his tomb; it will see miracles innumerable.

CLARE. And thou, what is thy profession?

MAN OF PERUGIA. An inn-keeper, noble lady.

CLARE. O travesty! This seraphic life, these excelling faculties and this immaculate pattern of Jesus Christ, twisted but to fatten the purses of inn-keepers and merchants!

MAN OF PERUGIA. Forgive us in the name of the Blessed One.

CLARE. Pagans that you are! To such as you the body of a Saint is but a talisman. Shall it be God's will that His chosen shall stand surety for vilest pettifogging and churlish traffickings? Francis, be he dead or living, is with the company of his brethren and you are mindful of their quality: the meek, the peaceful and the indigent! Quit yourselves to be deserving of his prayers and benisons by the pursuing of his example and by the accomplishment of his works. To your gates again, Men of Perugia, and you, citizens of Assisi, seek your hearths anew. The days of Francis are yet unfulfilled and angels will sentinel him more jealously than thou. Begone, I say, begone.

[Exit CROWD]

ELIAS. Providence waited upon thy coming, my sister. These demoniacs . . .

CLARE. Francis?

ELIAS. Alas!

CLARE. The physician of Arezzo, who preened himself that he would mend him?

ELIAS. We bide his coming.

CLARE. [*To BERNARD.*] Brother Bernard, a sinister foreboding doth importune my spirit. An his malady wax greater, I conjure thee, admonish me.

BERNARD. Myself will come, upon my faith.

[*FRANCIS, borne in upon a litter.*]

FRANCIS. Lay me there! Thanks, good brethren. The bourn of my childhood stretches to my vision and memories, like unto the faces of friends after long journeying, press about me. And my pilgrimage draweth to its end. Like as the yellow leaves are stripped from off the trees, so are my thoughts strewn drifting, drear and full of heaviness. 'Twould be a fair eve wherein to die!

BERNARD. My father! . . .

FRANCIS. Thou, thou abidest the first in my heart, and the while thou livest, the world is witness of a faithful brother. Ah, sister Clare! blessed be Jesus that hath brought thee hither. My heart bounds to behold thee, for thy loveliness is single as a star.

CLARE. Ah, reverend brother, thou art racked with suffering. . . .

[*BERNARD leads away ELIAS and the others.*]

CLARE. Unhappy brother !

FRANCIS. My torment wrings me inexpressively, but 'tis my soul that is disconsolate, convulsed with anguish.

CLARE. That Jesus might grant me to be weighed with thy afflictions. . . .

FRANCIS. Rash prayer ! I challenged suffering in my distraction, aspiring to feel the Passion of Jesus ; I dared to match myself with God and perish 'neath the burden of my desire.

CLARE. Thy tortured body. . . .

FRANCIS. The boundaries of bodily pain are set ; the pain of the soul hath none ! It stretches infinite, unmeasured and unfathomable. Neither the thorns in His forehead, nor the lash, nor the spear, smote Jesus down, but His impotence.

CLARE. What say'st thou ?

FRANCIS. The breath of His thought alone might have quelled mankind and hurled the universe into the void. Howbeit, He came to save and not to chasten. Futurity streamed before Him, from the height of the gallows, vision whereat God Himself might blench. The old corruptions, the old abominations, and the old iniquities multiplied and accomplished in His Name, torture writ in the fringe of the Gospel. Cain smiting Abel with the Cross ! He beheld His priests, He beheld His children, covetous, savage, even as the children of Moloch, and He, the Christ, aghast at the heinousness of the Christians, cried out in a loud voice : "Lama, Lama, Sabachthani."

CLARE. Thou dost wrench my heart! The mind of Jesus quailing in the face of death, and thou saying it!

FRANCIS. Before the brethren, I bear my countenance unclouded. Unto thyself alone, my heart is single, for thou, thou art my very self.

CLARE. Oh, that I might be strong to comfort the well-belovèd!

FRANCIS. I will unbosom unto thee, O cherished heart of my heart. By all men I am hailed the Saint. Men call me venerable, envious of my high report, and I travail with desolation, with frenzy, and with cursing! Faint-hearted, I have fled the face of battle and my kindred I have forsaken, my peerless kindred God permitted unto me. Now, I am nought but a monk, unfruitful. My work is undone and bootless mine apostolate. It would behove me make a new beginning and establish a new Order. Ah! that I might betake me to the Chapter-house; verily they should know my will. Where are they who have stolen my brethren, where are they who have robbed me of my children?

CLARE. Francis, I will uphold the Rule; I swear it.

FRANCIS. Surely, my sons are fated to forswear themselves; for the lesser brethren shall be lords of convents and churches and shall renounce our holy Poverty. It is time that I die. Would that I had certitude that the hour were at hand, then would I be filled with rejoicing. Jesus hath seen within my heart and, be my travail here fordone, at the least I shall have laboured even unto the eleventh hour.

CLARE. My brother, how it rives my soul to part from thee! Shall I not see thee hereafter?

FRANCIS. Weep not; thou shalt see me, I declare it unto thee. I did solicit God that I might die by thy side, and He, of His favour, hath granted it.

CLARE. [*Weeping.*] Francis, Francis.

[*Enter the DOCTOR and the BRETHREN. Exit CLARE.*]

DOCTOR. My father, I can assuage thy pain, but the remedy is dolorous; I needs must brand thy forehead with a burning iron.

FRANCIS. Brother physician, I am ready. Only, first show me the iron.

DOCTOR. Wherefore?

FRANCIS. That I may speak to it and that it may be gracious unto me.

DOCTOR. [*Drawing the iron from the chafing-dish.*] Albeit I cannot fathom it, I bow to thine intent.

FRANCIS. Brother fire, thou art comely among the creatures; be favourable unto me; I have loved thee ever; temper thine heat, this day.

BRETHREN. [*Going out.*] Oh! [*Exit BRETHREN.*]

DOCTOR. Art thou ready?

FRANCIS. Yea. [*While his forehead is being branded.* Praised be my Lord, for my brother the fire, in that he lighteth the darkness of the night. Comely is he and jocund and sturdy and valorous.

DOCTOR. I marvel at thy fortitude!

FRANCIS. I have suffered no affliction. Thou mayest to thy task again.

DOCTOR. Alas, it were of no avail.

FRANCIS. Sayest thou so? Good friend, how long deemest thou that I have yet to live?

DOCTOR. My father, an it please God, thy trouble will depart from thee.

FRANCIS. Dost thou count me for a zany? Death hath no terrors for me. I am patient alike to live in suffering or die into felicity, so yoked I am with God.

DOCTOR. So be it, my father, according to my judgment, thy distemper hath no remedy! Haply some days, haply some hours will yet abide to thee.

FRANCIS. [*Rejoicing.*] Praised be my Lord, for our Sister Death. No creature may shun her unrelenting hand. Woe unto him that perisheth in sin, but, Lord, what gladness, what rapture unto him that hath fulfilled Thy holy will.

[*Enter ELIAS, BERNARD and the BRETHREN.*]

FRANCIS. [*Repeating.*] Praised be my Lord for our Sister Death. Fetch me a mandolin. I would that they sing unto me, for music will magnify the enchantment of my spirit. O blissful hour, O beatitude of thought! Thus, at the last, I am about to die.

ELIAS. Beloved father, it misgives me that thus mirthfully to look on death thou wilt but wilder and discomfort the elect. The most righteous tremble at this hour, the while thy spirit burgeons with peans of blithe-heartedness. How shall men say of thee?—What signifies death unto him who rejoices in its presence?

FRANCIS. Brother Elias, suffer me to profit by my

lot. It is the pleasure of my Lord Jesus that Death show me a gentle countenance. Shall I spurn the heavenly grace that hath in store for me the inexpressive bliss of looking on His face? Go, summon the brethren. Thou, Bernard, tell my sister Clare, I veer even unto the blessed confines of my life. Let her hasten, albeit that I tarry for her coming. Let her bring a pall in the fashion of a hair-cloth, wherein to wrap my body, and wax-light for my burial. Weep not, Bernard. Of old, I opened my arms to our Lady of Poverty, but the kiss of Sister Death hath brought me love in more abundance.

[*Exit* BERNARD.]

EGIDIUS. Alas, good Father, anon thou art lost to thy children and they shall live after thee, reft of the shining of thy truth. Be mindful of thine orphans, grant us thy forgiveness, them that are with thee and them that are missing, and lay thy hands upon them yet once more.

FRANCIS. O well-beloved brethren, abide in the faith of our Lady of Poverty, your lover, whom Jesus Himself hath loved. Be ye ever without dwelling, without bread and without money; otherwise, ye may not fulfil the Gospel. Labour, for I will have no drones for my brethren. After matins, be ye prompt to minister unto your neighbour. Beg nought, saving only your daily bread; otherwise ye slight them that are poor indeed. In no wise shall ye gain proselytes by disputing, but only by example. Be gladsome; it is the emblem of the pure in heart. All things, even the heavens and the earth, are

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compassed in a single word: Love! He that is evil, let him fast and pray, he that is evil hath no love. Love is the very Name of God. Love, love and love always. Hate nothing in the world, save only sin and money, and ye shall die, even as I, with carols on your lips. Weep not, the while that I am exulting. Ye shall come, yea, every one of you, unto the place where I go before. I open the heavenly way to the poor brethren, I go to make ready your dwelling in Paradise. Be ye steadfast! Myself, I go unto Him that I have served. My blessing on you.

[A BROTHER *enters and speaks in a whisper* to BROTHER ELIAS.]

ELIAS. My brother, an envoy of the Pope desires to speak with thee.

FRANCIS. Hath he been notified that the throes of death were upon me?

ELIAS. He urges his intelligence in the name of the Holy Father.

EGIDIUS. Wilt thou that I despatch him hence?

FRANCIS. I did covet this the last of my life's hours, to consecrate it to my children, even as a good father.

EGIDIUS. Give me the word and I will pack off this legate.

FRANCIS. Nay, I that leave neither book nor writ, I bequeath to you no monitor but my example only. Be ye obedient, even as I obey.

[*Enter the DOMINICAN.*]

DOMINICAN. My brother, in the name of the suzerain Pontiff.

FRANCIS. Knowest thou that my minutes are numbered?

DOMINICAN. I know it.

FRANCIS. The last sigh of the dying is dedicate unto his sons. My Lord the Pope hath no need of me.

DOMINICAN. Thus the decree of His Holiness: Let the sons of Francis be associate with the sons of Dominic and by the ordinance of Francis, to the confounding of the heretics.

FRANCIS. [*After a pause.*] It shall never be!

DOMINICAN. Thou shalt obey!

FRANCIS. I am the servant of Jesus!

DOMINICAN. The servant of his Vicar! At the hour of thy passing, thou withholdest thy soldiers from the Church.

FRANCIS. My brethren are no soldiers and I forbid them cope with error, yea, even in words.

DOMINICAN. Thou didst hie thee into the camp at Damietta and thou wilt not that thy children take the Cross.

FRANCIS. The Cross is a sanctuary and not a pillory.

DOMINICAN. The Cross is fashioned likewise as the sword.

FRANCIS. O blasphemy. . . .

DOMINICAN. Heresy. . . .

FRANCIS. Heresy is blindness; no man that honoureth Jesus may withstand Him.

DOMINICAN. What destiny dost thou purpose unto the froward that hath hardened his heart?

FRANCIS. And thyself?

DOMINICAN. Chastening, unto the atonement and the purifying of men.

FRANCIS. It was ordained the chastening of Golgotha was the last of chastenings.

DOMINICAN. Moses . . .

FRANCIS. Get thee gone from my pillow, thou recreant brother! Unto the eyes of the dying muffled from the earth, it is given ever and anon, to uncurtain futurity, and lo, in vision, I behold thy vestments incarnadined with the redness of the funeral-pyre—and with the redness of slaughter. Old men and women and children I behold them trail before me, marshalled in ominous ranks, and the innocent cry out against thee! Begone! The noise of the wailing goeth up to heaven, of the death-groans and the blasphemies! Surely Hell's gates yawn before me? Nay, it is thy work veileth the blue of the firmament with the smoke of thy pestilence and maketh the elements to stench with the reek of the charnel-house. Begone, thou scourge! Begone, thou butcher! Begone, I say! O thou that spillest fountains of tears and rivers of blood, in the name of the gentle Jesus, in the name of the Lamb immaculate.

DOMINICAN. The Devil hath possession of him!

EGIDIUS. Thou blasphemest!

[Enter CLARE and BERNARD.]

CLARE. [*To the DOMINICAN.*] He, verily, is the lamb, whereas thou art but the dog.

DOMINICAN. My sister . . .

CLARE. Thou dost overcast the heavens unto him that even now beholds them.

DOMINICAN. I am come in the name of the Pope. . . .

CLARE. In the Name of Christ, I say—Avaunt.

[*Exit DOMINICAN.*]

FRANCIS. [*Perceiving CLARE motionless.*] O Lady Mary, O Virgin without spot, Mother of eternity, Mother to my Saviour, thou comest to gather my soul into thy keeping and pilot me unto thy beloved Son?

BERNARD. He is persuaded that he beholds the Madonna.

ELIAS. It beseems us undeceive him.

BERNARD. Hold thy peace!

ELIAS. Nay, but . . .

BERNARD. Revere this holy phantasy.

FRANCIS. O miracle of compassion! O sublimity of grace. . . . The Mother of Jesus at the pillow of Francis! Boundless is Thy loving-kindness and exceedingly Thou dost glorify me!

[*CLARE steps forward and opens her arms.*]

O Most High, almighty, gracious Lady, unto thee praise, glory, honour and all veneration! . . . O Mary, they are meet for thee alone and no man is worthy to utter thy name. [*He dies in the arms of CLARE.*]

CLARE. [*After the convulsion of death has laid him still, falls on her knees.*] Saint Francis!

ALL. [*On their knees.*] Pray for us!

[*Harps ; and a golden aureole about the head of the Saint.*]

CURTAIN.

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